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'IIAPOENIA' : the teaching of the Cappadocian Fathers on virginity.

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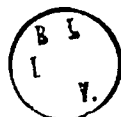
CHRISTOS B. CHRISTAKIS

**'ΠΑΡΘΕΝΙΑ':
THE TEACHING OF THE CAPPADOCIAN FATHERS
ON VIRGINITY**

**DISSERTATION SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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1996



CHRISTOS B. CHRISTAKIS

'ΤΙΑΡΘΕΝΙΑ'

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ON VIRGINITY**

Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

The thesis examines the idea of virginity in the thought of the three great Cappadocian Fathers of the later part of the fourth century, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory Nazianzen and Gregory of Nyssa. In an effort to make as far as possible a systematic exposition of the Cappadocian teaching on virginity, the theme is divided into three areas: The theology of virginity, the anthropology of virginity and the soteriology of virginity. Further, the relation between marriage and virginity and the meaning of true virginity are examined.

The Cappadocians start from the Trinity and develop the concept of the virginity of the Trinity which means the moral and ontological purity of God. Moreover, for them, the virginal way of life was exemplified by two exceptional virgins: Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary, who consecrated virginity for both sexes. They also elaborate on virginity as the angelic life and expand on the relation between virginity and apatheia. Virginity in both cases is not assumed out of revulsion for the flesh and is not understood as a passive situation of tranquillity, but as a dynamic way of life away from all passions.

The rhetoric of the Cappadocians does not reveal completely their attitude toward marriage. The true object of their rhetorical exposition is not marriage itself, but the desire for pleasure, the passionate attachment and delusion of happiness, when these are the basis of marriage. The role of virginity is very important in unmasking all these false expectations. It provides the calm, freedom and the dying out of passions necessary for the experience of Christian life. However, for the Cappadocians the wholeness of virtue is possible even among the necessary concerns with family and active life which come with marriage.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- ΒΕΠΕΣ: Βιβλιοθήκη Ἑλλήνων Πατέρων καί Ἐκκλησιαστικῶν Συγγραφέων, Athens: Ἀποστολική Διακονία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ἑλλάδος, 1955-.
- R.Deferrari: Loeb Classical Library 4 vols., R.Deferrari (London, 1926-1934).
- GNO: Gregorii Nysseni Opera. Berlin and Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1921-.
- Loeb: The Loeb Classical Library, London and Cambridge (Mass.), 1912-.
- PG: Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Graeca. 162 vols. Paris: Jacques Paul Migne, 1857-1866.
- PL: Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Latina. 221 vols. Paris: Jacques Paul Migne, 1844-1855.
- SC: Sources Chrétiennes Paris: Cerf, 1940-.
- Wickham-Williams: Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning, The Five Theological Orations of Gregory Nazianzen. Intr. and com. F.Norris. Trans. L.Wickham-F.Williams (Leiden, 1991).

INTRODUCTION

A.

THE CAPPADOCIANS

Cappadocia, a vast, but seemingly remote region in east central Anatolia, produced a brilliant monopoly of men and women of saintly intellect, writers and preachers who left an eternal stamp on the character of Christianity.¹ In the third century, Firmilian, bishop of Caesarea for forty years, induced his friend Origen to visit Cappadocia and played a prominent part in the Council at Antioch concerned with conditions on which Christians who recanted during persecution could be readmitted to the Church. Gregory the Wonder Worker laid the groundwork for Trinitarianism and has been termed the evangeliser of his native Cappadocia. Later, Macrina the elder, grandmother of Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa and pupil of Gregory the Wonder Worker; Gregory, bishop of Nazianzos, father of Gregory Nazianzen; Amphilochius, bishop of Iconium; Naucratus, eldest brother of Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa; and among other important personalities in their family, their younger brother Peter, bishop of Sebaste and their sister Macrina the younger. Also other remarkable women in these families were: Emmelia, Basil's and Gregory's mother; Nonna, Nazianzen's mother; Gorgonia, Nazianzen's sister.² But, of course the most illustrious of all were the three great Cappadocian Fathers from the later part of the fourth century,³ Basil of Caesarea,⁴ his friend Gregory Nazianzen⁵ and the younger brother of Basil, Gregory of Nyssa.⁶

¹. Cf.C.Vermeule, 'Cappadocia on the Eve of the Byzantine Empire', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* XI (1965), 132-146; A.Meredith, *The Cappadocians* (London, 1995), 1-9.

². See P.Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea* (Oxford, 1994), 1-26 for a good description of the immediate family.

³. The general bibliography on the Cappadocians is immense. For the purposes of this study particularly useful were the following: B.Otis, 'Cappadocian Thought as Coherent System', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 12 (1958), 95-124; B.Tatakis, *The Contribution of Cappadocia to the Christian Thought* (Athens, 1960); J.Bernardi, *La Prédication des pères Cappadociens* (Marseille, 1968); J.Pelican, *Christianity and Classical Culture, The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (Yale University Press, 1993), A.Meredith, op.cit.

⁴. Among the many general works on Basil of Caesarea particularly useful in this study were: W.Clarke, *St.Basil the Great. A Study in Monasticism* (Cambridge, 1913); M.Murphy, *Saint Basil*

The purpose of the present work is to examine the idea of virginity in the thought of these three great thinkers. The Cappadocians pioneered the effort to formulate Orthodox Christian doctrine and to nurture the development of the Church's institutions. Although they were closely associated through family ties and friendship, they differed from one another in character.⁷ But despite this, their influence on theology was one and the same. They had a rich knowledge of ancient philosophical literature, a profound understanding of biblical texts, an ability to grasp philosophical and theological concepts and a deep spirituality, that proved them to be three of the most impressive thinkers Christianity has ever known.

In general literature on the early Christian period and its theology, the three Cappadocian theologians are mainly known for their contribution in the field of Trinitarian theology and Christology. However, their contribution in other areas, such as anthropology and cosmology, is also important. The Cappadocian teaching on the meaning and value of virginity, which is our specific interest in this work, is not exclusively contained in only one of these areas, but it is related with all the parts of the Cappadocian system.

and Monasticism (Washington, 1930); P.Humbertclaude, *La Doctrine Ascétique de Saint Basile de Césarée* (Paris, 1932); S.Giet, *Les Idées et l' action sociales de Saint Basile* (Paris, 1941); D.Amand, *L'Ascèse Monastique de Saint Basile* (Maredsous, 1949); M.Orphanos, *Creation and Salvation according to St.Basil of Caesarea* (Athens, 1975); Y.Courtonne, *Saint Basile et Son Temps* (Paris, 1975); K.Bonis, *Basil of Caesarea the Great (329/30-1.1.379), Life and works, treatises and teaching* (Athens, 1975); P.Fedwick, *The Church and the Charisma of Leadership in Basil of Caesarea* (Toronto, 1979); Idem. (ed.) *Basil of Caesarea, Christian, Humanist, Ascetic* (Toronto, 1981); P.Rousseau, op.cit.

⁵. On Nazianzen, J.Plagnieux, *Saint Grégoire de Nazianze théologien* (Paris, 1952); P.Gallay, *Grégoire de Nazianze* (Paris, 1959); R.Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus, Rhetor and Philosopher* (Oxford, 1969); D.Winslow, *The Dynamics of Salvation - A study in Gregory of Nazianzus* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979); A.Ellverson, *The Dual Nature of Man. A study in the Theological Anthropology of Gregory Nazianzus* (Uppsala, 1981).

⁶. The bibliography on Nyssa is immense. Especially useful were, H.v.Balthasar, *Présence et pensée: essai sur la philosophie religieuse de Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris, 1942); J.Daniélou, *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique. Doctrine spirituelle de Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris, 1953); R.Leys, 'La théologie spirituelle de Gregoire de Nysse', *Studia Patristica* II (Berlin, 1957), 495-511; W.Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature: Gregory of Nyssa and Macarius* (Leiden, 1965); D.Balas, *ΜΕΤΟΨΙΑ ΘΕΟΥ. Man's Participation in God's Perfections according to Saint Gregory of Nyssa* (Rome, 1966); C.Scouteris, *Consequences of the Fall and the Laver of Regeneration (From the Anthropology of St. Gregory of Nyssa)* (Athens, 1973); M.Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue. An Interpretation of Gregory of Nyssa's 'De Virginitate'*, Diss. (Boston College, 1987).

⁷. Cf.R.v.Dam, 'Emperors, Bishops, and Friends in Late Antique Cappadocia', *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 37 (1986), 53-76.

Basil of Caesarea has been characterized as 'the man of action', Gregory Nazianzen as 'the master of oratory', and Gregory of Nyssa as 'the thinker'. Basil was the only one among the three to whom the epithet Great has been attributed. Gregory Nazianzen 'might be called the humanist among the theologians of the fourth century in so far as he preferred quiet contemplation and the union of ascetic piety and literary culture to the splendour of an active life and ecclesiastical position';⁸ he also earned the epithet 'the Theologian' for his defense of the doctrine of the Trinity. Gregory of Nyssa was 'neither an outstanding administrator and monastic legislator like Basil, nor an attractive preacher and poet like Gregory of Nazianzus';⁹ nevertheless, 'as a speculative theologian and mystic he is certainly the most gifted of the three great Cappadocians'¹⁰. For this reason his prominence over the other two is evident in most works dealing with the Cappadocians.¹¹

Macrina the Younger, the oldest sister of Basil and Gregory of Nyssa, should be added to the three Cappadocian Fathers, as 'the Fourth Cappadocian'. Macrina was according to Nyssa, a model for both of them by her profound and ascetic spirituality. At the death of their parents she became the educator of the entire family. She was even the teacher of both her great brothers, 'sister and teacher at the same time'.¹²

From the other contemporary figures of Cappadocia, Amphilochius of Iconium also deserves to be mentioned. He was an intimate friend of the three Cappadocians and very probably a cousin of Gregory Nazianzen. Although he was recognised as a patristic authority as early as the fifth century, unfortunately his writings were not cherished like the works of his friends and most of them are no longer extant. Amphilochius is important in the present discussion because of his

⁸ J. Quasten, *Patrology* v.III (Westminster Md., 1990), 236.

⁹ Ibid. 254.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ See for example J. Pelican, op.cit. A certain prominence of Nyssa exists also in the present work.

¹² Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection* (PG 46,12). The bibliography for the person and the role of Macrina is becoming increasingly long. See especially, P. Wilson-Kastner, 'Macrina: Virgin and Teacher', *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 17 (1979), 105-117; R. Albrecht, *Das Leben der heiligen Makrina auf dem Hintergrund der Thekla-Traditionen* (Göttingen, 1986); A. Momigliano, 'The Life of Macrina by Gregory of Nyssa', *On Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (Middletown Conn., 1987), 206-221; G. Luck, 'Notes on the Vita Macrinae by Gregory of Nyssa', *The Biographical Works of Gregory of Nyssa* A. Spira (ed.), (Cambridge Mass., 1984), 21-33; C. Christakis, 'A Woman Christian Sage of the Fourth Century: Macrina the Virgin-Philosopher', *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ* 66, v.2 April-June 1995, 330-361.

campaign against those extremist heresies which repudiated marriage and misunderstood virginity and ascetical practices.¹³

J. Meyendorff has pointed out that the Cappadocians 'appear to us as real human beings, reveal the substance of their Christian vocation, uncover the program of their spiritual life, unveil the intellectual background of their use of Greek philosophy at the service of Christian theology, and explain the meaning of their ministry as monastic leaders and bishops of the Church.'¹⁴ Their letters and other writings reveal repeated conflicts of opinion and clashes of personality, for example between Gregory Nazianzen and Basil, and again between the two brothers, Basil and Gregory of Nyssa. Yet in the same writings they could also repeatedly speak of one another with cordial affection and fraternal admiration.¹⁵

Modern scholars have confirmed that there is 'a striking similarity among the Cappadocians'¹⁶ in thought, even in language, a similarity that reflects, but goes beyond their having shared a common background and social class.¹⁷ This agreement of thought characterises also the Cappadocian teaching on virginity. However, it is also true what B.Otis has expressed: 'Though everyone recognises the agreement of thought among the great Cappadocians, not enough explicit attention has as yet been given to the real coherence of their doctrinal system.'¹⁸ To transfer this to the discussion in this work, it is true that not enough attention has been given to the coherence of the Cappadocian teaching on virginity. It is the aim of the present work to examine in a systematic way this teaching.

The teaching of Gregory of Nyssa on virginity is found in his ascetical writings, but also some of his dogmatic and exegetical works present a lot of useful material for this study. The work that is particularly relevant is Nyssa's *On Virginity*

13. Cf.K.Bonis, 'What are the Heresies Combated in the Work of Amphilochios Metropolitan of Iconium (c.341/5-395/400) "Regarding False Asceticism"?', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* IX (1963), 79-96; K.Holl, *Amphilochius von Ikonium in seinem Verhältnis zu den großen Kappadoziern* (Tübingen, 1969).

14. G.Barrois,(ed.) *The Fathers Speak: St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, St. Gregory of Nyssa* (New York, 1986), 9.

15. Cf.Gregory Nazianzen, Or. 43,67 (SC 384, 272).

16. F.Norris, *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning: The Five Theological Orations of Gregory Nazianzen* (Leiden, 1991), trans. L.Wickham-F.Williams (Leiden, 1991), 185; J.Pelican, op.cit. 6.

17. The Cappadocian belonged to the curial class (those required by law to hold public office when called upon to do so). Cf.T.Kopecek, 'The Social Class of the Cappadocian Fathers', *Church History* 42 (1973), 453-466.

18. B.Otis, op.cit. 97.

which is the earliest of all his works. It was written shortly after Basil had been elected bishop in 370 and before Gregory himself was consecrated to the see of Nyssa in 371.¹⁹ Most of the scholars see this work as written at Basil's request and each of the later ascetical writings as a return to the task of giving depth and added substance to his brother's concept of the ascetic ideal. According to this interpretation Nyssa interprets the philosophical, theological, and mystical implications of Basil's Rules. However, this is not necessarily the case. M.Hart in a recent thesis supported several differences between the two brothers that make difficult the hypothesis that Nyssa wrote his *On Virginity* in order to support Basil's system. It seems that a more balanced view is more realistic. Nyssa writes having in mind Basil's system, but stating also his own understanding on the issue of virginity.

The rest of Gregory's ascetical writings (*On the Christian Profession*,²⁰ *On Perfection*,²¹ *De Instituto Christiano*,²² *The Life of Macrina*) also refer to the ideal of virginity. Related to these are three exegetical treatises: *On the Life of Moses*, *On the Psalms*, and *On the Song of Songs*, which in Jaeger's opinion should be placed among the ascetical writings because they, too, are written as aids to attaining the highest goals of asceticism.²³ Two more of Gregory's exegetical treatises are of great importance as he builds his anthropology of virginity as it can be seen in the second chapter of the present thesis. These are *On the Creation of Man* and *In Hexaemeron*. Our exposition relies also in some of the dogmatic writings of Nyssa, as the *Against Eunomius*, the *Catechetical Oration* and the *Dialogue on the Soul and the Resurrection*.²⁴

19. Cf. J. Stiglmayr, 'Die Schrift des heiligen Gregor von Nyssa über die Jungfräulichkeit', *Zeitschrift für Askese und Mystique* 2 (1927), 334-359; H. Knackstedt, *Die Theologie der Jungfräulichkeit beim hl. Gregor von Nyssa*, Diss. (Rome, 1940); J. Gribomont, 'Le panégyrique de la virginité, oeuvre de jeunesse de Grégoire de Nysse', *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique* 43 (1967), 247-266; J. Kirchmeyer, 'Le De Virginitate de Grégoire de Nysse: Notes de lecture', *Science et esprit* 21,1 (1969), 141-148. Some textual details are discussed by E. Gallicet, 'Osservazioni sul "De Virginitate" di Gregorio di Nissa', *Civiltà classica e cristiana* 3 (1982), 119-151.

20. Cf. M. Keenan, 'De Professione Christiana and De Perfectione. A Study of the Ascetical Doctrine of Saint Gregory of Nyssa', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 5 (1950), 167-207.

21. Ibid; C. McCambley, 'Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Περί Τελειότητος - On Perfection', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 29 (1984) 349-379.

22. Cf. G. Marriot, 'The "De Instituto Christiano" attributed to Gregory of Nyssa', *Journal of Theological Studies* 19 (1918), 328-330; W. Jaeger, op.cit.; M. Canévet, 'Le "De instituto christiano" est-il de Grégoire de Nysse? Problèmes de critique interne', *Revue des études Grecques* 82 (1969), 404-423.

23. W. Jaeger, op.cit. 32.

24. Cf. G. May, 'Die Chronologie des Lebens und der Werke des Gregor von Nyssa', *Écriture et culture philosophique dans la pensée de Grégoire de Nysse*, M. Harl, (ed.) (Leiden, 1971), 51-67.

Gregory Nazianzen did not write a specific treatise on virginity. However, one can find in his writings many allusions in this theme. A poetic nature as he was, Gregory incorporated his ideas on virginity in some of his moral poems: *In Laudem virginitatis*, *Praecepta ad virgines*,²⁵ *Exhortatio ad virgines*,²⁶ *Ad virginem*, *Ad monachos in monasterio degentes*, *De pudicitia*, *De castitate*, *Comparatio vitarum*, *De virtute*. More relevant material can be found in his Orations and Letters.

Although Basil of Caesarea did not write a specific treatise on virginity either, a lot of material related to the ideal of virginity can be found in his sermons, letters, ascetic and monastic writings.²⁷ Basil acknowledges the existence and excellence of virginity, but he hardly ever advises it directly.²⁸ Being the founder and leader of the monastic settlements in Asia Minor, he was more concerned with the organisation of the monastic life and its details than with the philosophical and theological interpretation of the ascetic or virginal ideal. This part of the task fell to Gregory of Nyssa. However, in Basil's system, virginity occupies a more important role than the one the few allusions in his *Asceticon* imply.²⁹

Quite a lot of work has been done by scholars in the form of articles and material in broader books on Gregory of Nyssa's idea of virginity. This is not the place to refer to them. From the less well known one should mention M.Hart's recent work.³⁰ Hart opens some new avenues in the understanding of Nyssa's deeper theology of virginity. It is my opinion that his interpretation is not accurate in all its

25. Cf.F.Zehler, *Kommentar zu den 'mahnungen an die Jungfrauen' (Carmen I,2,2) Gregors von Nazianz*, Diss. (Münster, 1987).

26. There is a dispute if this is by Gregory Nazianzen. Cf.R.Keydell, 'Die Unechtheit der Gregor von Nazianz zugeschriebenen Exhortatio ad Virgines', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 43 (1950), 334-337 and L.Wickham - F.Williams, 'Some notes on the Text of Gregory Nazianzen's First Theological Oration', *Studia Patristica* XIV, part III (Berlin, 1976), 366, n.1.

27. Cf.W.Clarke, op.cit. 63-106; idem. *The Ascetic works of Saint Basil* (London, 1925); P.Rousseau, op.cit. 190-232.

28. Cf.J.Gribomont, 'Saint Basile et le monachisme enthousiaste', *Irénicon* 53 (1980), 132-135. The *Moral Rules* 70,8 and 77 mention in a discrete way the principal texts of the New Testament on virginity. In the *Asceticon* apart from an indirect allusion in the *Long Rule* 5 of the 'ascholiae' of marriage which are difficult compatible with the service of God, there is another allusion of the profession of virginity in the *Long Rule* 15,4.

29. Ibid. 132, n.21. Cf.Basil of Caesarea, *Letter 46* (R.Deferrari, v.1 283-310).

30. M.Hart, op.cit. Cf.idem, 'Reconciliation of Body and Soul: Gregory of Nyssa's deeper theology of Marriage', *Theological Studies* 51 (1990), 450-478; idem, 'Gregory of Nyssa's Ironic Praise of the Celibate Life', *Heythrop Journal* XXXIII (1992), 1-19.

dimensions. However, he challenges successfully some of the traditional ideas on the interpretation of virginity in Nyssa.

In contrast with Nyssa, there has been almost no previous study of ideas of virginity in the writings of Gregory Nazianzen³¹ and Basil of Caesarea. One can find only fragmented ideas spread among studies written on their ascetic and monastic theology.³² That is why I found most challenging the absence of any systematical, critical and comprehensive study of the Cappadocians' thought as a whole on this issue, and of the differences and similarities between them. The present work aims to cover partially the gap that now exists. However, the subject has broader dimensions and requires more study.

The Cappadocian teaching on virginity cannot be examined independently from its background, from what had been said on virginity by the previous Christian thinkers. For this reason in the second part of the introduction I review the background of the Cappadocian teaching on virginity and some modern interpretations of the notion of virginity in the early church. Then, in an attempt to create a systematic exposition of the Cappadocian teaching on virginity, I divide the entire subject into five areas: The theology of virginity, the anthropology of virginity, the soteriology of virginity, the relation between marriage and virginity and the meaning of true virginity. In this way, I try to form their teaching into a comprehensive body and examine how this fits as a part of the entirety of their thought, and also suggest some of the implications of this teaching for the modern church.

In the first chapter, the theology of virginity, I examine the Cappadocian connection of virginity with the Trinitarian life, with the relations between the three persons of God. Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory Nazianzen maintain that virginity is the imitation of the pure Trinity, for the Holy Trinity is the first Virgin, since the nature of the Trinity is pure of any passion and therefore is the model of virginity.

³¹. Cf. A. Papadopoulos, 'Marriage and Celibacy according to Gregory Nazianzen', *Orthodoxia* 18 (1943), 147-150.

³². Cf. T. Spidlik, *Grégoire de Nazianze. Introduction à sa spiritualité* (Roma, 1971); P. Humbertclaude, op.cit.; D. Amand, op.cit.; J. Gribomont, *Histoire du texte des Ascétiques de saint Basil* (Louvain, 1953); idem, 'Le monachisme au IV^e siècle en Asie Mineure: de Gangres au Messalianisme', *Studia Patristica* II (Berlin, 1957), 400-415; idem, 'Le renoncement au monde dans l'idéal ascétique de saint Basile', *Irénikon* 31 (1958), 282-307; 460-475; idem, 'Saint Basile et le monachisme enthousiaste'.

Virginity is also the distinctive characteristic of all the bodiless angelic powers, in contrast to the fallen spirits. The Cappadocians develop further the idea of virginity as the angelic life.

In the second chapter, the anthropology of virginity, I try to present the basic elements of the Cappadocian anthropology in terms of the teaching on virginity. The anthropology of the Cappadocians has two fundamental concepts which make possible the interpretation of the postlapsarian state of man and clarify the meaning and significance of virginity. The first is 'the image of God', the second the deeply significant notion of the 'garments of skin'. I examine both of them by dividing the chapter in two parts: a) creation of man - virginity in paradise b) fall of man - loss of virginity and introduction of marriage.

In the third chapter I examine the role of virginity in the salvation of humankind. The Cappadocians see the entire divine economy, the whole chain of salvation in the light of virginity and create, so to say, a soteriology of virginity. I examine in this context how the Cappadocians see the role of virginity in the return to paradise, the connection between virginity and apatheia, the person of Christ as the Archvirgin and the role of the Virgin Mary.

In the following chapter I examine the Cappadocian contrast between virginity and marriage and try to discover what the Cappadocians really say about the institution of marriage and its role in the life of the Christian. I examine the association of marriage and death and the eschatological vision of virginity as the limit of death; the notions of immortality and incorruptibility as they relate to marriage and virginity; and the tension between the active and contemplative lives as it can be seen in the comparison between marriage and virginity.

Finally in the last chapter and under the light of the previous discussion, I try to investigate the meaning of true virginity. For the Cappadocian Fathers, virginity is seen in every activity. It includes a double element: integrity of the body and purity of the soul from passion. The method of sanctification they call true virginity is not simply celibacy, but insight into the nature of the mind, the body, and the world as the final solution to the problem of attachment and passion. The Cappadocians see the ultimate roots of attachment as delusion. Accordingly, it is not marriage or civic responsibility which ties one into passion and attachment, but the delusions under

which one operates in those affairs. Virginity and marriage, although they presuppose different practical behaviours, are based on the same theology of the Kingdom of God and, therefore, on the same spirituality.

B.

THE BACKGROUND

The roots of the ideal of virginity lie at the very heart of the Christian tradition, in Christ's more radical exhortations on the requirements of discipleship and in Paul's advice to early Christian communities to follow his example of the virgin life so as not to detract from preparation for the coming Kingdom of God.¹ These early roots brought forth a flourishing of radical renunciation. The Greek words *παρθένος* and *παρθενία* mean in a proper sense virgin and virginity whereas the words *άγνός*, *άγνεία* and *έγκράτεια* have the broader meaning of chaste, chastity and continence. However, all these words in certain cases were used in a sense of radical renunciation referring to virginity. The eschatologically motivated words of Paul and the historical exigencies of the early Christian centuries combined to produce an ascetic ideology and practice virtually unheard of in antiquity and certainly never before practiced by such large numbers of people representing a wide spectrum of society. From an early period in some sectors, and universally after around 300 A.D., the ideal of virginity practised equally by men and women, enjoyed a moral and cultural supremacy in the Christian Church that remained unchallenged until the Reformation.²

It is also true, however, that Christian virginity is not in a strict sense an absolute novelty. In ancient religions and cultures there were men and women who practised abstinence of the sexual relations, but in most cases the character of such abstinence was temporary and for cultural reasons.³ A certain sexual purity was required for particular ritual and magical rites, perhaps because of an intuition that the

¹. Mk.8,34-9,1; Lk.9,1-6; 1Cor. 7.

². P.Brown, 'The Notion of Virginity in the Early Church', in B.McGinn, J.Meyendorff, J.Leclercq, (eds.), *World Spirituality*, v.16 *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century* (New York, 1985), 427.

³. H.Drijvers, 'Virginity', *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, M.Eliade (ed.) v.15 (New York, 1987), 279-281.

integrity of natural forces permitted magical or mythical union with cosmic forces. Similarly, in the Greco-Roman antiquity the cult of the virgin goddesses (Artemis, Athena) attributed to the virginity of a goddess a magic power of strength and blessedness. It also demanded continence in priests and priestesses of certain cults⁴. Such was the case with the vestals in Rome⁵: the immaterial purity of sacred fire had to be attended only by virgin priestesses, and a miraculous power was attributed to the prayer of the vestals. But, the virginity of the vestals was primarily tied to the well-being of the state. Also the ritual virginity of the Greek tradition was always only temporary and the asceticism among athletes without moral connotations.⁶ Philosophical systems, for example that of the Pythagoreans, Platonists, and Neoplatonists, tended to encourage abstention from carnal pleasures, but this was advocated more to encourage contemplation and the pursuit of wisdom than because any proper value was attributed to virginity.⁷

In the Old Testament, virginity as a permanent state in life for religious motives was quite unknown. Marriage was regarded as the normal state for all adult men and women in Israel, but premarital virginity was expected in women.⁸ The example of Jeremias shows that virginity could have been imposed by God as a sign of a prophetic mission.⁹ Although the evidence is not conclusive, it seems that most

4. Cf. H. Jeanmaire, *Sexualité et mysticisme dans les anciennes sectes helléniques* (Paris, 1952). S. Benko [*The Virgin Goddess; Studies in the Pagan and Christian Roots of Mariology* (Leiden, 1993)], supports that there exists a direct line between the pagan goddesses and Virgin Mary and that 'Mariology' is a continuation of the veneration accorded to fertility goddesses (op.cit. 263).

5. R. Schilling, 'Vestales et vierges chrétiennes dans la Rome antique', *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 35 (1961), 113-29; M. Beard, 'The Sexual Status of Vestal Virgins', *Journal of Roman Studies* 70 (1980), 12-27.

6. See G. Sissa, *Greek Virginity* (Cambridge Mass., 1990) for a systematic examination of virginity in ancient Greece.

7. Cf. H. Marrou, *L'idéal de la virginité et la condition de la femme dans la civilisation antique* (Paris, 1957 & 1959), 39-49; T. Zeses, *Marriage and Celibacy in the Patristic works on Virginity* (Thessalonica, 1987), 131-147. See also A. Meredith, 'Asceticism - Christian and Greek', *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s., vol. XXVII, pt. 2, October 1976, 313-332, for a comparison of the ascetic ideas of Athanasius, Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa, with Porphyry, Iamblichus and Philostratus.

8. G. Papamichael, 'The Old Testament on marriage and virginity', *Ecclesiastike Aletheia* 23 (1910), 502-504, 512-514, 535-537.

9. Virginity is often connected with prophecy in the Early Church. The prophets received their extraordinary vision on account of their angelic way of life. For an examination of the connection between virginity and prophecy see L. Legrand, *The Biblical Doctrine of Virginity* (London, 1963), 25f; N. Tsoulkanakis, 'Virginity and Prophecy', *Kleronomia* 5 (1973), 385-398.

of the Essenes and the Therapeutae were celibates, primarily because of their apocalyptic and eschatological preoccupations.¹⁰

Thus, both for Judaism and for the Greco-Roman world, virginity was an exception. The original elements in Christian virginity were the definitive character and the voluntary renunciation it was implying. It appeared as a specific vocation in the heart of the Christian way of life. The motivation was to dedicate body and soul to the Lord.¹¹

The word virgin appears in the New Testament for the first time in Acts 21,9 when Paul traveling to Jerusalem stayed in Caesarea of Palestine with Philip, 'who had four virgin daughters'. In the New Testament, virginity, not in itself, but as practised for supernatural motives, is placed on a higher level than marriage. Christ praises those who remain voluntary 'eunuchs' 'for the sake of the kingdom of heaven',¹² so that, freed from the burdens of married life, they can more easily be His intimate followers in seeking the kingdom of God. Paul, while making it clear that all Christians may marry, recommends that the unmarried remain as they are because of the nearness of the *parousia*¹³ and because of the greater freedom they have to serve the Lord.¹⁴

In the aftermath of the apostolic age, we find an attempt within the emerging Church to impose the assumption that one could not be a baptized Christian and fail to practice sexual continence. Ultimately this view led to the schismatic tendencies of the Encratites which the church had to oppose.¹⁵ Virginity was upheld as great or even greater than marriage by vast numbers of Christians. This was particularly so within

¹⁰. Cf. J.Devault, 'The Concept of Virginity in Judaism', *Marian Studies* 13 (1962), 23-40 and T.Zeses, op.cit., 148-156.

¹¹. Cf. W.Molinski, 'Virginity', *Sacramentum Mundi*, K.Rahner, (ed.) v.6 (New York, 1970), 333-337.

¹². Mt.19,10-12. Cf. Q.Quesnell, 'Made themselves Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 19,12)', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30 (1968), 335-358.

¹³. 1Cor. 7,25-31.

¹⁴. 1Cor.7,32-35. For the teaching of the Bible on virginity, see L.Legrand, op.cit. and T.Zeses, op.cit. 157-160. Cf. also G.Delling, 'παρθένος', *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, v.5, G.Friedrich (ed.) (Grand Rapids, Mi. 1967), 826-837; R.Devine, *Holy Virginity. A study of the N.T. teaching on Virginity and Celibacy*, Diss. (University of Freiburg, 1973); W.Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy: The Hellenistic Background of 1Corinthians 7*, Diss. (Cambridge Mass., 1991).

¹⁵. For a good account of these tendencies see U.Bianchi, (ed.) *La tradizione dell' Enkrateia, Motivazioni ontologiche e protologiche* (Roma, 1985).

Syria and Mesopotamia. Indeed in the early Syrian Church celibacy was considered a requirement for admission to baptism.¹⁶ Virginity was also a prominent theme in the Apocryphal Acts.

From the end of the 1st century and the beginning of the second, one finds allusions (in the *First Epistle of Clement* and in Ignatius' of Antioch letters) to ascetics who lived continently 'in honour of the flesh of Christ'.¹⁷ From these words we may conclude that the imitation of the virginity of Christ had become by that time a motive for continence. Ignatius greets 'the virgins that are called widows' of the church of Smyrna.¹⁸ According to Polycarp of Smyrna the virgins live in a pure consciousness.¹⁹ We read in the *Second Epistle of Clement* that only the 'pure in body' may share in Christ's body, the Church and that the kingdom of God will come only when all fleshly lusts and distinctions of sex shall have disappeared.²⁰

Perfect continence, along with voluntary poverty and austerity of life, was a constitutive element of the ascetical life that began to develop in the second century. From the beginning of the century, a state or a profession of virginity was recognized in the Church, which granted those who practised it a place apart, comparable to that of a widow. The Apologists have precise references. Justin the Martyr writes that a great number of men and women have become disciples of Christ from their youth and kept themselves spotless (*ἄφθοροι*) all their life.²¹ Athenagoras also writes about those men and women who concentrate all their efforts towards God in virginity and continence.²²

In the third century there are abundant texts that attest to the place, increasingly important, that 'the holy virgins' assume in the life of the Church. In many instances the ideas of the Encratites encountered in the third century and even earlier were mixed with Gnostic dualism.²³ The best evidence of this is given by

16. Cf. A. Voöbus, *Celibacy. A Requirement for Admission to Baptism in the Early Syrian Church* (Stockholm, 1951).

17. Ignatius, *Pol.* 5,2 (SC 10,174-176). Cf. *1 Clem.* 38,2 (SC 167,162-164).

18. Ignatius, *Smyrn.* 13,1 (SC 10,166-168).

19. Polycarp, *Phil.* 5,3 (SC 10,210).

20. *2 Clem.* 14, J. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers* p.I v.II, 243-248; 12, *ibid.*, 237-240.

21. Justin, *1 Apology* 15, *ΒΕΠΕΣ* 3, 168.

22. Athenagoras, *Plea for Christians* 33, *ΒΕΠΕΣ* 4, 308.

23. For a broader discussion of this phenomenon see M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (New York, 1966).

Clement of Alexandria. Clement is a focal point in the battle between the Encratites and those who would indulge the flesh. In the third chapter of his *Stromateis* he names a large number of sects who had only scorn for marriage. His basic reply is that creation is good and sexual intercourse as a contribution to creation is consequently good also. However, Clement is clearly in favour of virginity.²⁴ Origen's ideas on virginity are also important in this respect. According to Origen to reject marriage and sexual activity was to make plain the spirit's 'manifest destiny'. Virginity preserved an identity already formed in a former, more splendid existence and destined for yet further glory. Virginity stood for the original state in which every body and soul had joined. The intact flesh of a virgin stood out also as a fragile oasis of human freedom. Refusal to marry mirrored the right of a human being, the possessor of a preexistent, utterly free soul, not to surrender its liberty.²⁵

From Africa came the testimony of Tertullian and of Cyprian: By virginity, Tertullian designated a three-fold physical integrity: virginity from birth; virginity from baptism;²⁶ and chaste monogamy, often initiated upon the death of one's spouse and maintained by continence thereafter.²⁷ By virginity, man, God's image, becomes like God.²⁸ Apropos of vestal virgins and continent pagan priests, Tertullian speaks of virginity that leads to ruin; only Christian virginity saves.²⁹ In Tertullian's thought as a Montanist, virginity ensures 'a great capital of sanctity; by renouncing the use of sex we acquire the Holy Spirit'.³⁰ Tertullian also maintains that the virgins are 'the spouses of Christ'.³¹ For Cyprian virgins are 'the most illustrious portion of the flock of Christ';³² the violation of their purpose of virginity is considered adultery.³³

24. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, 3 ΒΕΠΕΣ 8, 11-50. For a more detailed account of Clement's ideas on virginity see J.Quasten, *Patrology* vol.II (Utrecht, 1952), 34-35; J.Broudéhoux, *Marriage et Famille chez Clément d'Alexandrie* (Paris, 1970), 99-114; W.Zion, *Eros and Transformation: Sexuality and Marriage. An Eastern Orthodox Perspective* (Lanham Md. 1992), 51-56.

25. Cf.J.Trigg, *Origen* (London, 1983), 19; H.Crouzel, *Virginité et mariage selon Origène* (Paris, 1963); P.Brown, *The Body and Society Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (London, 1991), 160-177.

26. Tertullian, *De exhortatione castitatis*, 1,4 (PL 2,963-964).

27. F.Church, 'Sex and Salvation in Tertullian', *Harvard Theological Review* 68 (1975), 95-96.

28. Tertullian, *De exhortatione castitatis*, 1,3 (PL 2,963).

29. Ibid. 13,2 (PL 2,977-978).

30. Ibid. 10,11 (PL 2,974-975).

31. Tertullian, *De virginibus velandis*, 16 (PL 2,960). For Tertullian's ideas on marriage and virginity see W.LeSaint, *Tertullian, Treatises on Marriage and Remarriage*, Ancient Christian Writers 13 (Westminster Md., 1956).

32. Cyprian, *De habitu virginum*, 3 (PL 4,455).

33. Ibid. 5 (PL 4,456-457); ibid. 20 (PL 4,472-473).

Virginity for Cyprian included, besides a gift from the Spirit, recognition from the Church: a virgin should not only be, but be known as, and believed to be, a virgin. A virgin must remember that continence follows Christ, and virginity is destined to the Kingdom of God.³⁴

In the fourth century, the writings of the Fathers who exalted virginity were numerous. They emphatically recommended it and elaborated upon its spiritual value.³⁵ The two Epistles addressed to virgins of Pseudo-Clement of Rome are an exhortation to virginity and a description of its requirements: defeat of the passions, of this world and the devil; imitation of the Virgin Mary and the apostles John, Paul, Barnabas and Timothy; reproduction of the image of God by becoming real virgins and not only in name.³⁶

Methodius of Olympus wrote of virginity in a lyrical dialogue inspired by Plato's *Symposium*. The study of virginity by Methodius is symbolic and poetic. His *Symposium* is a dialogue, in which ten guests plus the hostess, all virgins, pronounce the praises of virginity. The speeches adopt diverse points of view, so that the whole *Banquet* constitutes a well balanced survey of the question. Much of the material is not particularly original, though its presentation is always interesting. Far from condemning marriage, the *Symposium* devotes one whole speech to its defence. There will come a time when marriage will no longer be practised. This will be when the predetermined number of mankind has been reached. Meantime, one may still enter marriage in order to fulfill the creator's will: 'increase and multiply'. Yet the Christian newness resides precisely in the possibility of participating now in the heavenly life, of overcoming corruption and of growing the seeds of immortality. God aimed at bringing mankind nearer to heaven by passing from one practise to another, until, having reached the supreme and ultimate teaching, that of virginity, it finds its fulfillment there. At this level, the order to 'increase and multiply' finds an

³⁴ Ibid. 5 (PL 4,456-457).

³⁵ See, P.Camelot, 'Les traités "De Virginitate" au IV^e siècle', *Études Carmélitaines* (1952), 273-92; F.Bourassa, 'La virginité dans l'état d'innocence', *Sciences Ecclésiastiques* 6(1954), 249-257; M.Aubineau, *Introduction*, Gregory of Nyssa, On Virginity, SC 119 (1966), 23f.

³⁶ Cf.A.Harnack, Die pseudo-Klement Briefe de virginitate und die Entstehung des Mönchtums, *Sitzungsberichte, Berlin Academy* (Berlin 1891), 361-385.

application which is indeed higher than in Genesis: through the marriage with Christ, the virgin unites in the highest manner virginity and fruitfulness.³⁷

Athanasius dealt with the subject of virginity in several occasions. There exists a treatise *On Virginity* among his works that has been the object of a long controversy. M.Aubineau, who has given a thorough evaluation of all the Athanasian writings on virginity,³⁸ proved that it cannot be considered as genuine because its style and vocabulary. However, this small book had considerable importance for the history of asceticism. It forms a kind of manual for the Christian virgin, giving detailed instruction about the conduct and duties of the bride of Christ. There is also an *Epistle to the Virgins* which is related to *On Virginity* and was used by Ambrose in his *De Virginibus*,³⁹ and another treatise *On Virginity*,⁴⁰ that are both most likely genuine. This last one is addressed to all who are willing to live in the state of virginity. It does not deal with the monastic life, but with virgins who live at home with their relatives. It regards them as brides of Christ who have signed a contract with Christ which will last to their death. Athanasius calls their life angelic and admonishes them to abstain from secular amusements. Athanasius' *Letter to the Virgins who went to Jerusalem to pray and returned* is another treatise on virginity with detailed rules for this state. Athanasius recommends first of all, vigilance against the devil and warns against sensuality.⁴¹ Lefort published fragments of two other treatises on virginity attributed to Athanasius. The first of them calls virginity 'a divine virtue', 'the wealth of the church' and 'a sacrificial gift reserved for God'. The virgin is a woman by nature, but by her free choice and firm resolution she surpasses nature and lives an immortal life in a mortal body.⁴²

37. Cf. F. Palmieri, 'Alexandrian Mysticism and the Mystics of Christian Virginity, Gregory of Nyssa and Methodius of Olympus', *The American Catholic Quarterly Review* 41 (1916), 390-405; G. Tibiletti, *Verginità e matrimonio in antichi scrittori cristiani* (Roma, 1983).

38. M. Aubineau, 'Les écrits de S. Athanase sur la virginité', *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique* 31 (1935), 144-151.

39. L. Lefort has edited coptic fragments of it ('S. Athanase sur la virginité', *Le Muséon* 42 (1929), 197-275).

40. J. Lebon, 'Athanasiana Syriaca I. Un λόγος περί παρθενίας attribué à saint Athanase d'Alexandrie', *Muséon* 40 (1927), 209-218.

41. J. Lebon, 'Athanasiana Syriaca II. Une lettre attribuée à saint Athanase d'Alexandrie', *Muséon* 41 (1928), 170-188. Cf. also S. Elm, 'Athanasius of Alexandria's Letter to the Virgins: Who was its intended Audience?', *Augustinianum* 33 1993, 171-183.

42. L. Lefort, 'Un nouveau 'De Virginitate attribué à saint Athanase', *Analecta Bollandiana* 67 (1949), 145-146 and idem, 'Encore un 'De Virginitate de saint Athanase?', *Mélanges De Ghellinck* (Gembloux, 1951), 216-218.

Basil of Ancara who had been a medical doctor before becoming a priest and a bishop, drew on his science in his *De virginitate*. This treatise was believed to have been lost, until 1905 when F.Cavallera identified it with a tract always previously listed among the spurious works of Basil of Caesarea *On the True Purity of Virgins*.⁴³ The title indicates the author's purpose: he intends to show the virtues which a virgin must have, if her life is to lead her to sanctity. His detailed account of virginity gives unusual importance to physiological descriptions. Basil's treatise is a work with which Gregory of Nyssa was familiar⁴⁴ and one whose problematic of incorruptibility or integrity (*ἀφθαρσία*) he accepts and develops in his own treatise.⁴⁵ Eusebius of Emessa also developed a teaching on virginity which is outlined in his Homilies *VI De martyribus* and *VII De virginibus*.⁴⁶ Evagrius of Pontus wrote an admonition to a virgin which was written in a similar way as the Proverbs of the Old Testament.⁴⁷ The Syriac tradition is represented by two great writers, Aphrahat and Ephraim, who considered sexual abstinence as normative after baptism, even for married couples.⁴⁸

John Chrysostom composed more treatises on asceticism, virginity and marriage than any other Greek-writing Church father.⁴⁹ For Chrysostom, virginity was the condition in which Adam and Eve were created and in which God had intended that they remain. By adopting virginity, we not only became more godly, we are also recalled to our true human nature. Chrysostom also emphasizes the personal effort in his discourse of virginity. Virginity must involve free decision. His ideas on virginity are mainly contained in his work *On Virginity* which is an extended commentary on 1Cor.7. However, it is not a simple explication of the Pauline text. Chrysostom's interpretation is influenced by the social and intellectual setting of the

⁴³. F.Cavallera, 'Le "De virginitate" de Basile d'Ancyre', *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 6 (1905), 5-14.

⁴⁴. M.Aubineau, SC 119, 137-142.

⁴⁵. Cf.J.Janini Cuesta, 'Dieta y virginidad: Basilio de Ancyra y son Gregorio de Nisa', *Miscellanea Comillas* 14 (1950), 187-197 on the relation between Basil of Ancara and Gregory of Nyssa.

⁴⁶. Cf.D.Amand, 'La virginité chez Eusèbe d'Émèse et l'ascétisme familial dans la première moitié du IV^e siècle', *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 50 (1955), 777-820.

⁴⁷. Cf.S.Elm, 'The Sententiae ad Virginem by Evagrius Ponticus and the problem of Early Monastic Rules', *Augustinianum* 30 (1990), 393-404; idem, 'Evagrius Ponticus' Sententiae ad virginem', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 45 (1992), 97-120.

⁴⁸. A.Voöbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient, I: The Origin of Asceticism* (Louvain, 1960), 93-95.

⁴⁹. E.Clark, Introduction, *John Chrysostom On Virginity - Against Remarriage* (New York, 1983), vii.

late fourth-century Christianity and from his free training in Greek rhetoric and philosophy.⁵⁰

In the West, Ambrose has no less than four treatises dedicated to virginity: *De virginibus*, *De Virginitate*, *De institutione virginis*, and *Exhortatio virginitatis*. For Ambrose man and woman are able to lead the angelic life by choosing the state of virginity.⁵¹ The virginal life manifests the fundamental Christian freedom by gaining now what others will obtain only in heaven. But, for Ambrose chastity is not reserved to virgins, but each calling -of marriage, of widowhood, of virginity- has a chastity of its own.⁵² He also insists on the inner and spiritual nature of Christian virginity embraced for love of God.⁵³ Jerome wrote to the virgins of whom he had become spiritual director *Ep.22 to Eustochium*, *Ep.130 to Demetrias* and engaged in vigorous polemic against the adversaries of virginity: *Adversus Helvidium de Mariae virginitate perpetua*, *Adversus Jovinianum*, and *Contra Vigilantium*. Jerome is unfolding in all these writings a 'systematic theory of sexuality'⁵⁴ and its place, or rather lack of place in the earnest Christian's life. Virginity is the original state willed by God, and sexual intercourse came after the fall. Jerome adds though that this doctrine implies no disparagement of marriage. He also elaborates on the positive picture of virginity as the spiritual marriage with Christ.⁵⁵

Last, but not least, Augustine wrote an eloquent treatise, *De Sancta Virginitate* and he was a strong advocate of virginity. His own conversion to Christianity was tied to his renunciation of lust and the power it held on him. When he received the grace to renounce sexual relationships, he felt his conversion was completed and he was consequently baptised. Marriage is good -as only a concession to unrestrained passion- but, virginity is better. Although Augustine praises virginity highly, he does not forget the superior value of obedience and humility. One of the special characteristics of his teaching was also the idea that it was impossible to be continent

⁵⁰. For a full exposition of Chrysostom's idea of virginity see A.Moulard, *Saint Jean Chrysostome, le défenseur du mariage et l'apôtre de la virginité* (Paris, 1923) and E.Clark, op.cit. Cf. also, M.George, 'John Chrysostom's Changing views on Christian marriage', paper read in the *Twelfth International Conference on Patristic Studies* (Oxford, 21-26 August 1995).

⁵¹. Ambrose, *Exhortatio Virginitatis*, 4,9 (PL 16,357).

⁵². G.Tavard, *Woman in Christian Tradition* (Notre Dame, 1973), 108. Cf. R.D'Izarny, *La verginité selon saint Ambroise* (Lyons, 1952).

⁵³. G.Tavard, op.cit. 102-109.

⁵⁴. J.Kelly, *Jerome, His Life, Writings and Controversies* (London, 1975), 12.

⁵⁵. Ibid. 104-7, 181-9. Cf. G.Tavard, op.cit. 109-113. For an account of Jerome's idea of virginity see D.Dumm, *The Theological Basis of Virginity according to St.Jerome* (Latrobe, Pa., 1961).

by one's own effort. This emphasis on the necessity for grace over one's own efforts grew out of his position against the Pelagians.⁵⁶

Scholars have tried in many ways to explain the rise of the virginal ideal in the early Church. It is important in this discussion, to remember that, when the early Fathers speak of virginity, their positions, which are frequently antithetical and complementary, are not so simple that one can reduce them to a single insight.⁵⁷

One hypothesis suggests that the virginal ideal as part of the wider ascetical ideal flourished as a response to the end of persecutions of Christians in the early fourth century and the replacement of the ideal of martyrdom with the ideal of virginity.⁵⁸ However, one can not account completely for the rise of the virginal ideal by invoking the historical move from cultural marginality to hegemony which the Christianizing of the empire represented. The ideal of virginity is highly complex, containing theological arguments, current philosophical ideas, and a collection of contemporary rhetorical themes which produce a tightly woven image of virginity as the ideal of Christian life. The development of such an ideal was an inviting challenge for the writers of the early church, since they were always cautious towards a body-spirit dualism which was often the basis of the arguments for virginity. They avoided

⁵⁶. For an account of Augustine's teaching on virginity see M. Agterberg, *'Ecclesia-Virgo'. Étude sur la virginité de l'Église et des fidèles chez S.A.*, (Louvain, 1960); J. Chappel, *St. Augustine's Ethics of Sexuality* (Saint Louis, 1974); E. Pagels, *Adam, Eve and the Serpent* (London, 1990), 127-150; T. Felder, *Jungfraulichkeit als anteilnahme am geheimnis der Kirche nach Augustinus*, Diss. (Universitaet Innsbruck, 1993); P. Brown, *The Body and Society*, 47-49, 70-71, 402-427.

⁵⁷. Cf. W. Clarke, op.cit. 13: 'No single cause is sufficient to account for the great proportions assumed by the ascetic movement in the fourth century.' This is true also for the notion of virginity. The general bibliography on the notion of virginity in the Early Church is extensive. Most useful in the present effort to outline the main characteristics of the Cappadocian teaching on virginity were: M. Nygent, *The literary treatment of Virginity in the first four centuries of the Greek Christian Literature*, Diss. (The Catholic University of America, 1942); T. Camelot, *Virgines Christi. La Virginité aux premiers siècles de l'Église* (Paris, 1944); idem, 'Les traités De virginitate au IV siècle'; F. Bourassa, 'Excellence de la Virginité: arguments patristiques', *Sciences Ecclésiastiques* 5 (1953), 29-41; S. Papacostas, *Celibacy in Christ and the Monastic Brotherhoods in the Fathers of the Church* (Athens, 1961); T. van Eijk, 'Marriage and Virginity, Death and Immortality', J. Fontaine and C. Kannengiesser, (eds.) *Epektasis: Melanges offerts au cardinal J. Daniélou*, 209-235 (Paris, 1972); J. Bugge, *Virginitas. An Essay in the History of a Medieval Idea* (The Hague, 1975); G. Mantzaridis, 'Marriage and Celibacy in the Church', *Gregory Palamas* 649, (1975), 259-270; P. Brown, *The Body and Society*; idem, 'The Notion of Virginity in the Early Church'; S. Bilalis, *Virginity according to the Fathers of the Church* (Athens, 1984); C. Munier, *Marriage et Virginité dans l'Eglise ancienne* (Bothe, 1987).

⁵⁸. M. Viller, 'Le Martyre et l'ascèse', *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 6 (1925), 105-142; A. Fytrakis, 'Martyrion and Monastic life', *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ* 19 (1941-1948), 301-329; E. Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr, The Monk as the Successor of the Martyr* (Washington, 1950); A. van Loveren, 'Once Again: "The Monk and the Martyr", Saint Anthony and Saint Macrina', *Studia Patristica* XVII, part 2 (Oxford, 1982), 528-538.

it by returning to the idea first expressed by Paul, that marriage was good, but virginity was better: this notion became both the cornerstone for patristic discourses on the preferability of virginity and the tool used against those who were thought to pursue their asceticism too rigorously, such as the Encratites attacked by John Chrysostom and the Eustathians condemned at the Council of Gangra.⁵⁹

The tension between the eschatological call to celibacy and the fact that one does not sin by marrying and certainly has the freedom to do so remains throughout the early history of the Church. One can see this tension in an eschatology whereby the kingdom of God having been realized required that we live as the angels and an eschatology which recognized in the church an existence between the times. The pressure exerted on the early Church by Gnostic dualism led to a scorn for the present world, for the flesh, for all institutions within this world. The eschatological call to an entirely spiritual life, based on the shortness and difficulties of the present age, slowly gave way to a dualism of the flesh versus the spirit in the present age. Marriage often suffered by being an institution of the present age and requiring a profound involvement in the bodily and the material through the procreation of children. Clearly marriage stood against the Gnostic movement, which rejected the present age and sought to live entirely in the spirit. The resistance that the Early Fathers of the Church (among them most prominently the Cappadocian Fathers) offered to the rejection of the goodness of creation and the legitimacy of marriage lay in obedience to the incarnational principle. Certain tensions between virginal life and married life should not be exaggerated.⁶⁰ The majority of the Early Fathers, while accepting the heroic witness and the superiority of the virgin state, never allowed the sexual bond of marriage to be denigrated.

There have been many modern attempts to study and understand the Early Christian approach to sexuality generally and specifically to virginity.⁶¹ In the

⁵⁹. Cf. John Chrysostom, *On Virginity*, chapters 1-11, 25-50; T. Camelot, 'Les traites De Virginitate au IV siècle', 279.

⁶⁰. The monastic tradition revealed an awareness that prayer and sanctity are possible to some who live in the world, and the tradition existed that some worldly people would be judged more favourably at the last judgment than many monks. Cf. K. Ware, 'The Monk and the Married Christian: Some Comparisons in Early Monastic Sources', *Eastern Churches Review* 7,1 (1974), 72-83.

⁶¹. Together with the works of M. Foucault, P. Brown, R. Price and J. Behr found in the following, one should mention the efforts, by: A. Cameron, 'Redrawing the Map: Early Christian Territory after Foucault', *Journal of Roman Studies* 76 (1980), 266-271; idem; 'Virginity as a metaphor: women and the Rhetoric of early Christianity', in A. Cameron, (ed.) *History as Text: the Writing of Ancient History* (London, 1989), 181-205; idem. *Christianity and the Rhetoric of the Empire* (Oxford, 1991),

following we will attempt a brief critical review of some of them as a necessary context of the discussion on virginity. M.Foucault in this sense should come first. Although the fourth volume of his *History of Sexuality*, in which he intended to study the early Christian experience of sexuality, never appeared, Foucault made comments in the second and third volumes of his *History* and in various articles.⁶² According to him, Christianity brought to the world a different problematization of sexual activity on the basis of a new technology of the self. The structure of the relation to the self elaborated by Christianity is based on the stigmatism of the ethical substance, desires rather than *aphrodisia*, as evil and fallen. It is based on a mode of subjection characterized by obedience towards divine precepts and one's confessor and on a practice of verbalizing, a hermeneutics of the self in which one constituted oneself as the subject of desires. It is this hermeneutics of the self as a subject of desires, and the necessity for verbalization and renunciation, that Foucault considered to be the most characteristic and significant contribution of Christianity.

While Foucault elaborates his *History* around a complex of philosophical thematics, P.Brown attempts a more socio-historical investigation, adding occasionally theological considerations.⁶³ For Brown, the pursuit of virginity meant more than a simple purification. Virginity was aimed at replacing the tangled complex of private thoughts with a simple heart open towards God. Sexuality was seen as an example of the divisions within the human will that generated man's chronic contentiousness with his neighbour and resistance to the will of God. The teaching of Paul on the battle between the spirit and the flesh, where flesh is not restricted to sexuality, but certainly draws attention to it, was echoed in the theology of virginity. Moreover, virginity displayed the victory of Christ over the 'present age'. By refusing to contribute through procreation, it was possible to symbolize, concretely in one's own person, the victory already won by Christ, replacing death as the last enemy to be overcome. It was in the realm of sexuality that the mark of total commitment to Christ was to be judged. Whereas in the first two centuries of the

171-188; E.Fuchs, *Sexual Desire & Love: Origins and History of the Christian Ethic of Sexuality and Marriage* (New York, 1983), 84-128 and A.Rouselle, *Porneia. On Desire and the Body in Antiquity* (Oxford, 1988).

⁶². M.Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, v.3: *The Care of the Self* (London, 1986); idem. *Politics, Philosophy, Culture* (Routledge, 1990).

⁶³. P.Brown, 'The Notion of Virginity in the Early Church'; idem, 'Late Antiquity', *A History of Private Life* (London, 1987) v.1, P.Veyne (ed.) *From Pagan Rome to Byzantium*, 273-311; idem, 'Bodies and Minds: Sexuality and Renunciation in Early Christianity', D.Halperin, J.Winkler and F.Zeitlin (eds.), *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient World* (Princeton, 1990), 479-95; idem, *The Body and Society*.

Church apostasy was the sin that separated the sheep of Christ from the goats of the Devil, now it was separation from the sensuous and immoral life of the city which was to be the criterion for fidelity to the Lord.⁶⁴ Finally, for Brown the struggle for virginity became a social battle. The defence of marriage is seen as a defence of the established social order, and the praise of virginity expressed a nostalgia for that more free and equal society that was believed to have existed before the Fall.⁶⁵ The outcome of the struggle is described by Brown as the medieval compromise: 'government of the Church by a celibate élite, unique respect accorded to monks and nuns safely shut away in monasteries, while the traditional family under its male head remained the basic social unit in the outside world'.⁶⁶ Moreover, the exaggerated stress on the danger to monks of propinquity to women which is found in the monastic literature is seen as a strategy to keep monks cooped up and thereby insulate society from the radical challenge of their renunciation.⁶⁷ For Brown the Christian ideal of virginity stood out as an act of defiance to the demands placed on it by society. The body was no longer permeable to the demands of society, the necessity of marriage and procreation for its continuance.

R.Price's contribution to the discussion is valuable.⁶⁸ According to Price, Christian sexual ethics, including the idea of virginity, owed little to pagan thought despite the points of convergence.⁶⁹ It developed from certain New Testament themes, as the theme of the Church, the body of Christ that is holy and the importance of the single minded purity of heart. The teaching on virginity of this period is part of the whole Christian ethical teaching, which had as its center the purity of the Church as the body of Christ. This required that the members of the Church should strive to maintain the purity of their own bodies. According to this interpretation, the emphasis on the holiness of the Church came as an effort to draw clearly the boundaries between Church and society, so that the Church was not to feel contaminated by its environment. Christians show themselves as constituting a holy people, set apart as distinct, third race from both Jews and Christians. For Price, there is a close connection between the body of a Christian and the Church as body.

⁶⁴. P.Brown, 'Late Antiquity', 289.

⁶⁵. Idem. *The Body and Society*, 79-82; 122-139; 169-171; 205-209.

⁶⁶. Cf.R.Price, 'The Distinctiveness of Early Christian Sexual Ethics', *Heythrop Journal* XXXI (1990), 268.

⁶⁷. P.Brown, *The Body and Society*, 241-244.

⁶⁸. R.Price, *op.cit.* 257-276.

⁶⁹. Price supports this notion extending to the wider context of Christian sexual ethics.

The great Christian theme of the holiness of the Church created an emphasis on maintaining purity of the body and reinforced the ideal of virginity. Responding to the need to express and preserve the purity of the Church as the body of Christ through the purity of the bodies of its members, the Church tried to maintain her own integrity as a heavenly society that was only temporarily residing on earth.⁷⁰

Price also claims that important in this respect was the Early Christian ideal of a perfect response to God through a single-minded purity of heart. The concern was with single-mindedness, purity of heart and reorientation of the will, so that it would cease to serve the complex and warring impulses of the natural man and respond instead with unreserved openness to the will of God.⁷¹ In this way, this ideal of singleness of heart led to the commendation of virginity. Thus, virginity became important, not only as a means of freeing the soul from the reins of passion, but also as a symbol of the '*single*' life. To be enmeshed in duality was the beginning of diversification and alienation. It was the principle of matter and the soul's fall into matter. The virgin rejected duality and returned to the single nature which was the immutable and divine nature. In virginity someone could find a symbol of his withdrawal from the world of change and generation, a symbol which referred to the world of immutable being.

In a recent article, J.Behr proposes a different approach to the broader issue of sexuality and asceticism in the early Church.⁷² He suggests that the early Christian approach to the experience of sexuality and the meaning of virginity and chastity must be examined in the context of the theme of rebirth, baptism by 'water and spirit', a theme that is the foundation on which early Christian texts were written. According to this suggestion, the early Christian approach to sexuality is not 'governed by the finality of death or the hope of a future salvation' that asceticism and virginity will bring. It is rather the expression of the belief that the source of one's being and life is no longer grounded in himself, 'a created being, inherently limited and finite, but is grounded in his relation to Christ, and ultimately is Christ's own uncreated and infinite life and existence. Christian asceticism is, thus, not man's attempt at a divine

⁷⁰ R.Price, op.cit. 272-275.

⁷¹ For the ideal of singleness of heart, and the threat to it that sexual urges were seen to pose, see P.Brown, *The Body and Society*, 34-39, 70-71.

⁷² J.Behr, 'Shifting Sands: Foucault, Brown and the Framework of Christian Asceticism', *Heythrop Journal* XXXIV (1993), 1-21.

mode of life, but is the very life of God lived by man.⁷³ The eschatological dimension of this experience brings the present age to an end, whilst nevertheless permitting the continuation of history. It is not an individual struggle, but is pre-eminently located in the eucharist, which is an eschatological event. It is within the eucharistic synaxis, the coming together as one body that the life into which man has been reborn finds its fulfillment and the asceticism of that new life finds its meaning.

J.Behr's proposal to investigate the distinctiveness of the Early Church experience of sexuality and virginity around these themes is important. However, his criticism of Foucault, Brown and Price, though constructive, seems somehow not completely justified. Brown's proposal to see virginity at least partly as the outcome of the struggle between the individual and society, in which sexuality becomes determinative in a new understanding of the person, is by all means successful. Price's effort to show the distinctive flavour of the early Christian sexual ethics is valuable. Even, Foucault's attempt to draw a different problematization of sexual activity on the basis of a new technology of the self is helpful. All these views are rather complimentary than radically different and exclusive.

Having in mind these modern explanations in the following we are going to see what the Cappadocian Fathers said about virginity and examine some of the important issues related to this subject. The Early Church Fathers were called upon in conscience and in obedience to the Church's teaching to affirm both the validity and value of virginity and the goodness of marriage. The relevance of what has been said in this chapter is evident. The Cappadocian teaching on virginity cannot be examined independently from its background, from what had been said on virginity by the previous Christian thinkers and from the modern interpretations. The Cappadocian contribution, though distinct and original, interrelated with the background that has been reviewed in this chapter.

⁷³. Ibid. 18.

CHAPTER ONE

THE THEOLOGY OF VIRGINITY

A .

VIRGINITY: THE LIFE OF THE TRINITY

The term 'theology of virginity' implies the connection of the notion of virginity with the Trinitarian life, with the relations between the three persons of God.¹ To the Greek Fathers theology means primarily trinitarian theology.² What virginity is among humans is grasped in the same act by which we grasp the mode of generation proper to divine life. The Cappadocian Fathers especially describe this divine life in terms of virginity. For them the exercise of virginity is imitation of the life of the Trinity.³

The Cappadocians made a sharp distinction between 'the conceptions appropriate to attribute to deity', like monotheism, and all 'degraded and abject thinking about God', like polytheism, superstition, and idolatry.⁴ But, there was one category of such 'degraded and abject thinking about God' to which the Cappadocians were especially sensitive: the ascription of sexuality to deity. That sensitivity was related to the ascetic element in their theology and especially to their teaching on virginity. It has been claimed⁵ that, the most explicit summary of the ascetic theory in the works of the Cappadocians, Gregory of Nyssa's *On Virginity*, was as much an exposition of the doctrine of God as it was an exhortation to virginity. The Cappadocian sensitivity was also rooted at least partly in a revulsion against the language of polytheistic mythology, in which sexuality was often the

¹. The term theology is used in this very meaning especially by H.Knackstedt, op.cit.

² P.Evdokimov, *Woman and the Salvation of the World* (New York, 1994), 32.

³. G.Mantzarides, op.cit. 266; F.Bourassa, 'Excellence de la Virginité', 33f.

⁴. J.Pelican, op.cit. 87.

⁵. Ibid.

most evident characteristic of the so-called divine beings that were regarded as superior to human beings.

Genesis 1,27 ('God made man according to his image and likeness') is basic for an understanding of the Cappadocian Fathers' theology of virginity. It is an important element in all works on virginity and especially in Gregory of Nyssa's *On Virginity*, although as M.Aubineau remarks⁶, it appears only once in this work⁷. The paradisiac virginity of the first human couple is in a way a replica of the virginity of God.⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, emphasizing the principle of the conformity of the image, starts from God, the Prototype, in order to understand the type and define the essence of the human being as an image of the Existent. In terms of the divine, he structures man.⁹ In the perspective of Christian Platonism, he uses the terms of the philosophers when he speaks of the God of Revelation; God for him remains the Good¹⁰ (τό ἀγαθόν) and above all, the Beautiful¹¹ (τό καλόν). Drawing from Paul and John, he calls God wisdom as itself (αὐτοσοφία), sanctification, truth, joy and peace.¹² God is the perfect virtue¹³. But Gregory emphasizes also that God is the archetype of virginity. Already, Athanasius of Alexandria¹⁴ and Basil of Caesarea¹⁵ spoke against simple anthropomorphisms and recalled the transcendence of the eternal generation of the Word without any passion. But no-one before Gregory of Nyssa spoke of a virginal begetting in God: 'We need a good deal of intelligence to recognize the superiority of this grace which is perceived in connection with the incorruptible Father...'.¹⁶ Virginity for him is the same as Purity and Incorruptibility.¹⁷ But God is pure and incorruptible, truly holy and blameless: '... these words are used properly and primarily in praise of the

6. Cf.M.Aubineau, SC 119, 150.

7. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 12,2,4 (GNO VIII,I, 298,3).

8. Cf.R.Leys, *L'Image de Dieu chez Saint Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris, 1951), 110. Cf.P.Huybrechts, ' "Le Traité de la virginité", de Grégoire de Nysse. Idéal de vie monastique ou idéal de vie chrétienne?' *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 115 (1993), 227-242.

9. P.Evdokimov, op.cit. 32.

10. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 10,1,34 (GNO VIII,I, 289,25-26); 11,6,10 (GNO VIII,I, 297,7).

11. Ibid. 11,5,17 (GNO VIII,I, 296,17); 11,6,9 (GNO VIII,I, 297,6).

12. Ibid. 17,2,6-7 (GNO VIII,I, 314,16-17).

13. Ibid. 17,2,16 (GNO VIII,I, 314,26).

14. Athanasius, *Against Arians* 1,28 (PG 26,69 AB).

15. Basil of Caesarea, *Against Eunomius* 2,23 [SC 305,192-198].

16. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 2,1,1-3 (GNO VIII,I, 253,9-11). Cf.M.Aubineau, SC 119, 150-152; J.Bastero, 'La virginidad de Maria en San Ambrosio y en San Gregorio de Nissa', *Studien zu Gregor von Nyssa und der Christlichen Spätantike*, v. XII (Leiden, 1990), 259-260.

17. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 2,1,11 (GNO VIII,I, 253, 18-19).

incorruptible God'.¹⁸ He is the Purity and the *Apatheia*. We can use all these three names - incorruptible, holy and blameless - literally only for God. Naturally it follows that in God there is virginity to the highest degree.¹⁹

Nyssa applies the theme of participation in his theology of spiritual life. Nyssa's theory about the virginity of God is founded in his belief that all virtues, e.g. purity,²⁰ incorruption,²¹ justice,²² wisdom,²³ are found primarily and essentially in God, or rather He is all these virtues.²⁴ We possess them only by participation, and by partaking of them we possess somehow God Himself in us.²⁵ The category of participation is applied by Nyssa to every virtue he is treating. This is the case for virginity which is primarily a perfection of God.²⁶ However, virginity in God is not only the natural and immortal purity. Virginity is not something static, but something fruitful and dynamic. God has a Son whom he begets without passion (*πάθος*). In this way virginity 'enters the central secret of the Christian Faith' and finds in it its theoretical basis. 'One can correctly understand neither "Father" nor "Son" in God, if one does not take virginity into account.'²⁷

Gregory of Nyssa introduces the discussion of the passionless generation of the Trinity, within the context of his discussion of how to praise virginity: 'What power of words can equal such a grace? Or how can one fail to be afraid, that in his eagerness to praise he decreases the glory of its dignity for his listeners?'²⁸ In the first chapter of his *On Virginity* he tells us that the things that possess greatness by nature need no praise, their greatness being evident to all and eloquently expressed by their own nature better than by words. The examples he gives there are all visible, cosmic realities. When he turns to a discussion of trinitarian life and of the

18. Ibid. 1,16 (GNO VIII,I, 252, 5-6).

19. G.Söll, 'Die Mariologie der Kappadozier im Lichte der Dogmengeschichte', *Theologische Quartalschrift* 131 (1951), 430.

20. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Beatitudes*, 6 (GNO VII,II, 144,2-4).

21. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 2 (GNO VIII, I, 253-255).

22. Idem. *On the Beatitudes*, 4 (GNO VIII,I, 109,20-123,17).

23. Idem. *On the Ecclesiastes*, 5 (GNO V, 355-360).

24. Ibid.

25. Idem. *On the Beatitudes*, 6 (GNO VII,II, 143,20-144,4); *On the Song of Songs*, 9 (GNO VI, 285,16-17).

26. D.Balas, op.cit. 152-154.

27. O.Knackstedt, op.cit. 24.

28. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 2,1,18-23 (GNO VIII,I, 254,1-6).

operations of the human mind, he is no longer speaking about visible realities, but about the invisible greatness of God, who creates these visible realities.²⁹

Examining Gregory's trinitarian thought in other contexts, we understand the importance that he gives to the concept of the virginity of the Trinity. There, Gregory places great importance for praising virginity upon understanding how generation can be both free of passion and incorruptible. In *Against Eunomius* a book dedicated to the task of refuting the Arian teaching of Eunomius that only what is ungenerated can be truly divine, he tells us that, despite the fact that we humans beget with passion as with all bodily generation, we can understand the passionless generation of God by examining the way words or human reasoning proceed from the human mind without passion.³⁰ Human understanding is thus the proper analogy for divine life, and we can be said to experience something similar to virginal conception and generation within the operation of our own mind.³¹

In order to grasp the nature of virginal and passionless generation, Gregory of Nyssa says that we must have a certain type of understanding which he calls *σύνεσις*.³² The object of *σύνεσις* is not to comprehend the mind in the sense of fully grasping its very essence or principle. Such knowledge is in fact beyond our capacity, just as much as it is beyond our capacity to comprehend the essence of God.³³ We can grasp in a sense what God, the mind, and the world are in the relationship which these realities have to the activity of understanding. *Σύνεσις* is a type of knowledge very similar to the *μνήμη Θεοῦ* or 'memory of God' of Basil's theology. They both represent a certain relationship which one takes to the whole rather than a knowledge of something in particular. They refer to an awareness, an understanding-through-presence, which uncovers for us this original 'virginity' of the mind, its ability to reflect what is real, to bring forth intelligible form from the prior undifferentiated unity of the senses.³⁴

²⁹. B.Pottier, *Dieu et le Christ selon Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris, 1994), 292; M.Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 143.

³⁰. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, 3,2 (GNO II, 58,17-20).

³¹. M.Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 135.

³². Gregory borrows this term from the philosophy of Plotinus where it is used to refer to the type of knowledge of 'the One'.

³³. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, 12,2 (GNO I, 244,28-271,10); *On the Creation of Man*, 11,2 (PG 44,153D-156B).

³⁴. For the use of *σύνεσις* in Aristotle and Clement of Alexandria in comparison with Gregory of Nyssa and Plotinus, see M.Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 139.

Purity or 'virginity' of mind refers, therefore, to the natural receptivity of the intellect to what is intelligible. However, we can share the life of incorporeal beings only to the extent we share their purity. Anything that interferes with this natural receptivity to truth, anything that distorts the mind's ability to reflect what is real in its own understanding, separates one from the hyper cosmic nature. The passionless generation of the mind is an analogy by which we may understand the Trinity and also moral life among human beings. *Σύνεσις*, the apprehension of the divine nature, becomes the basis for a way of life and a 'discernment' of the beautiful which differs from that of most people. In Gregory's works we find the importance of the contemplation of the mind's operation for the practical aim of freeing ourselves from passion and attachment.³⁵

Human virginity is modeled on the chaste relations of Father, Son and Holy Spirit within the Godhead. Just as the Godhead is unchangeable, so the adoption of virginity here on earth allows one to participate in the heavenly quality of incorruptibility, that is, the inability to change or decline. Gregory Nazianzen indeed insists that the Holy Trinity is the first Virgin.³⁶ The nature of the Trinity is pure of any passion and therefore is the model of virginity.³⁷ Nazianzen insists on that especially in his poem *In Laudem Virginitatis*.³⁸

It seems paradoxical to find virginity in a Father who has a Son. However, the Cappadocians tried in the explanation of this term, as Basil put it in his treatise on the Holy Spirit, 'to count the terms used in theology as of primary importance, and to endeavour to trace out the hidden meaning in every phrase and in every syllable'.³⁹ Virginity exists in the incorruptible Father, who, although he has a Son, is virgin, because he begets without passion. *Apatheia* (lack of passion) is introduced at this point as an expression of virginity. Gregory Nazianzen connects the begetting within the Trinity with *apatheia* when he denies the association of begetting and passion in the Godhead by asking his heretical opponents: 'Are you afraid to speak of begetting within the Godhead, in case you attribute anything like

³⁵. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 2,1,11-18 (GNO VIII, I, 253,19-254,1).

³⁶. Πρώτη παρθένος ἐστὶν ἀγνή Τριάς', *In Laudem Virginitatis*, 20 (PG 37,523).

³⁷. 'ἄζυγές γάρ πρῶτα Θεός, μετέπειτα Θεοῦ χορός αἰέν ἑόντος', *ibid.* 13-14 (PG 37,523).

³⁸. *Ibid.* 11-14 (PG 37,523-524); 410-413 (PG 37,553).

³⁹. Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*, 1,2 (SC 17,107).

passion to the God of *apatheia*?⁴⁰ Nazianzen approached the relationship between the Father and the Son with great care. Any attempt to describe the exact process of the Father begetting the Son fails for him.⁴¹ Begetting does not involve change and passion since in terms of the Father begetting the Son, no body is involved. The term 'Father' itself is inappropriate if it is understood from the human context only.⁴² Pushing the meaning of 'begotten' could lead to the silliness of a hermaphrodite god and the many aeons.⁴³

For Nazianzen, while one may point to human generation of a son from a father, the divine generation cannot be reduced to the likeness of human generation. God is altogether outside of time, He is beyond passion, and he is not body. As with all other descriptions of God, the analogy of human generation points to, but it does not identify, the mystery of the Son's generation from the Father:

'I wonder why you do not go the full length of envisaging mating, periods of gestation and risks of miscarriage as necessarily involved, if he were to beget at all, or why you do not list the ways in which birds, beasts, and fish produce offspring and put the divine and unutterable generation down on one of these, or else use your new-fangled scheme to get rid of the Son. You are incapable of understanding that one who has a distinctive fleshly birth -what other case of a Virgin Mother of God do you know?- has a different spiritual birth, or rather, one whose being is not the same as ours has a different way of begetting as well.'⁴⁴

As God is beyond every category and beyond all comprehension, He is also beyond gender and passion. And as the physiology of the Son's generation from the Father is surrounded in the ineffable mystery of the divine Being, it far transcends the order of human generation which is corporeal and includes gender and passion.⁴⁵

The Cappadocians introduced the idea of virginity of the Trinity to battle with the heretical teaching that the Son has nothing to do with the idea of begetting. Heretics sometimes employed presuppositions in order to 'lay down such premises as might naturally lead the mind of the hearers in the desired direction and then, with

⁴⁰. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.40,42* (SC 358,294).

⁴¹. F.Norris, *op.cit.* 46.

⁴². Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.29,3-5* (SC 250,180-186).

⁴³. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.31,7* (SC 250,288). Cf.F.Norris, *op.cit.* 70.

⁴⁴. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.29,4* (SC 250,184; Wickham-Williams, 247).

⁴⁵. K.Wesche, 'God: Beyond Gender. Reflections on the Patristic Doctrine of God and Feminist Theology', *St.Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 30 (1986), 300-301.

these misleading presuppositions in place as an a priori, to leave it to the hearers to draw their erroneous conclusions for themselves.⁴⁶ From a mistaken presupposition heresy could proceed by logical consequence to the conclusion of its false doctrine. There was the false presupposition: 'Passion is absolutely linked with "begetting".' This was juxtaposed with the valid presupposition: 'The divine nature must continue in purity beyond the reach of passion.' That syllogism led, so Gregory of Nyssa alleged, to the heretical teaching: 'The Son is alien to the idea of begetting.' However, for the Cappadocians, in the Trinity the begetting is without passion, since it is a virginal begetting.

In its human and physical sense, begetting was used in Scripture, 'concerning a material existence subject to passion'; but in its transcendent sense, it was used 'concerning that divine, simple, and non corporeal life.'⁴⁷ When the Cappadocians speak about the Father and the Son, they left out of sight all the things that are visible to human nature in earthly generation. Using the apophatic method of exclusion the word Son is employed concerning the only-begotten one to indicate the close and true character of his manifestation from the Father.⁴⁸ By introducing the idea of virginity it was possible to lay behind such paradoxes as 'incorrupt Father' and 'passionless begetting'.

Their Arian and Eunomian opponents charged the Cappadocians with bringing the divine down to a human, even a fleshly level by speaking of the Son's generation from the Father, viewing God's fatherhood in an anthropomorphic way. The Cappadocians replied that the language of the divine generation must be understood in a way worthy of the divine. That is, generation within the Trinity does not involve gender or sexuality which characterize humans and animals, nor is it subject to conditions of time, space, matter, planning, effort, passivity, division and incompleteness, all of which characterize created modes of existence. Rather, in the divine, 'Father' means the source of Godhead who has no prior origin, the one who generates the Son and remains in virginity. Divine 'generation' means that the Son comes from the Father's own person and is consubstantial with him, with all that this implies. This generation is eternal and immaterial and occurs without passion in

⁴⁶ J. Pelican, op.cit. 193.

⁴⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, 3,2,4 (GNO II,53).

⁴⁸ J. Pelican, op.cit. 206.

all the senses of the word *πάθος*, including passivity and instability as well as sensual pleasure or pain.⁴⁹

Gregory Nazianzen counters the Eunomian accusation and he defends the concept of virginity in the Trinity in his *Fifth Theological Oration*. He answers that he does not imagine gender, nor marriage in God, concepts he considers outrageous and associates with pagan and Gnostic myths: 'Do you take it, by the same token, that our God is a male, because of the masculine nouns "God" and "Father"? Is the Godhead a female, because in Greek the word is feminine? Is the word "Spirit" neuter, because the Spirit is sterile? If you want to take the joke further you could say, as the trashy myths of old did, that God coupled with his own will and fathered the Son. We should then be faced with the bisexual God of Marcion, who pictured those outlandish aeons.'⁵⁰

The Son is a unique example of virginity as He is begotten from the Father without any passion, as light comes out of light, and He remains the only begotten: 'virginity is comprehended together with the only-begotten God who is the giver of incorruptibility, since it shone forth with the purity and absence of passion in His begetting. And again, the Son, conceived through virginity, is an equal paradox'.⁵¹ He is one with the Father and the Spirit, who proceeds from the Father. Virginity exists in the Son through the pure and impassionate manner of his begetting from the Father. He is begotten without any passion, as light comes out of light, and He remains the only begotten. This 'virginal' begetting is not within time: 'The begetting of the Son does not fall within time, any more than the creation was before time.'⁵² It was the failure to make this distinction that prompted Eunomius to insist, 'If you allow that God the Logos is to be believed to be eternal, you must allow the same of the things that have been created.'⁵³ The Trinity was 'beyond time' despite the limitations of the language that had to be used about it.⁵⁴

⁴⁹. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.29,4* (SC 250,182-184); *Or.29,8* (SC 250,190-192).

⁵⁰. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.31,7* (SC 250,288; Wickham-Williams, 282). Cf.V.Harrison, 'Male and Female in Cappadocian Theology', *Journal of Theological Studies*, ns, vol.41, Pt.2, October 1990, 456.

⁵¹. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 2,1,5 (GNO VIII,I, 253,13-16).

⁵². Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, 1,381 (GNO I, 138,26-27).

⁵³. Ibid. 3,6,60 (GNO II,207).

⁵⁴. Cf.Gregory Nazianzen, *Or. 29,3* (SC 250,180-182; Wickham-Williams, 247).

The *apatheia* explains the paradox here. Having a Son and virginity are normally incompatible concepts. Gregory of Nyssa himself declared this. The name 'Father' leads one to contemplate two things: a being who is the source and cause of all, and the fact that this being has a relationship with another person-for one can only be 'Father' if there is a child involved.⁵⁵ However, being a Father and virginity co-exist because the begetting of the Son is without passion. This is the answer to a point that is put in Gregory Nazianzen's poem *In Laudem Virginitatis*. There, the one who speaks for marriage puts the argument that in a way marriage exists in the Trinity; that marriage is *θεότητος ἑταῖρος* ⁵⁶, since God is Father and begets the Son⁵⁷. But the answer from Nyssa is straightforward: The Father begets, but without passion. The Son is begotten without having in him the seed of corruptibility and death, as happens in man's birth; '... the power, which destroys what is born, is begotten along with physical birth.'⁵⁸

Thus, the Cappadocians are eager to stress the distinction of begetting and generation of the Son when these terms are applied to God and when they are applied to humanity by elaborating on the concept of the virginity of the Trinity. Rejecting both polytheism and dualism in God they refused a pantheistic blurring of the ontological difference between the creation and the Creator.⁵⁹ For example to speak of God as having a 'nature' meant to say that God did not resemble the nature of the universe, but transcended it.⁶⁰ The term 'nature' (*φύσις*) was not referring to God and the universe as though these were alternate ways of speaking about the same reality. Gregory of Nyssa drew the sharpest possible distinction between the term begetting as applied to humanity and the same term as applied to deity in orthodox trinitarian usage:

'In human begetting beneath it all is nature, by God's will, with her wonder-working ... In a word, nature, advancing through all these processes by which human life is built up, brings the non-existent to birth ... But when it comes to the divine begetting, the mind rejects this ministration of nature ... anyone who enters on divine topics without any carnal conceptions will not ... count the Creator of all nature as in

⁵⁵. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, 1,568-571 (GNO I, 190-191).

⁵⁶. Gregory Nazianzen, *In Laudem Virginitatis*, 471 (PG 37,558).

⁵⁷. Ibid. 237 (PG 37,540). Cf.E.Bellini, 'La posizione dei monachi e dei vergini nella Chiesa secondo Gregorio Nazianzeno', *Scuola Cattolica* 99 (1971), 455-457.

⁵⁸. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 13,3,1-2 (GNO VIII,I, 305,3-4).

⁵⁹. Cf.Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.28,14* (SC 250,128-130).

⁶⁰. Cf.Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Life of Moses*, 1 (GNO VII,I, 22).

need of help from nature, or admit any extension of time into the life of the eternal.'⁶¹

Any begetting or other activity in the universe had to be temporal, not eternal as the divine begetting was.⁶²

For the Cappadocians, virginity also exists in the Holy Spirit, who has natural and incorruptible purity, for as Gregory of Nyssa says: 'In the same way, one perceives it in the natural and incorruptible purity of the Holy Spirit. For when you speak of the pure and incorruptible, you are using another name for virginity.'⁶³ However, virginity is not associated with the procession of the third Person of the Trinity by either Nyssa or Nazianzen. Obviously the theology of the Holy Spirit, as it was developed at that point, did not permit any association between virginity and the procession of the Holy Spirit.

Another element remains to be considered at this point. An incorruptible and immortal God begets a Son, who is the originator of incorruptibility and immortality. The ontological purity of God is opposed to the human begetting. In the latter the integrity of the father is always lost with the begetting. Moreover the human begetting becomes the means for the spreading of death, for as the father himself is damaged (he loses his intactness) in the begetting and he fades away, because he carries in himself the seeds of death, so he also gives the seeds of death to the son along with life. The son too is damaged when he uses the power of begetting and he must fade away like the father after he has again become the source of mortality for those who follow.⁶⁴ In God by contrast the Father remains intact and immortal and the Son does not carry in himself the seeds of death. That is why He also passes on a life which is immortal, remains Himself intact and becomes the originator of incorruptibility.⁶⁵

Accordingly, for Nyssa and Nazianzen the full concept of virginity in God means the moral and ontological purity of God. If one views virginity in the individual divine persons, it is found in the Father, in so far as He is Father and yet

⁶¹. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* (GNO I, 206,23-207,17).

⁶². J.Pelican, *op.cit.* 195.

⁶³. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 2,1,8 (GNO VIII,I, 253,18-19).

⁶⁴. Cf. *Ibid.* chapter 13.

⁶⁵. *Ibid.* chapter 2.

remains in *Apatheia* and *Aphtharsia*; in the Son, in so far as He is begotten without passion⁶⁶ playing any role and in so far as Himself is quite pure and immortal; finally, in the Holy Spirit, in so far as by His Nature He is pure and intact. Of begetting or being begotten there is no talk as far as the Spirit is concerned.

In this way, human virginity and virginity in God are very closely related. By human virginity, according to the Cappadocians, assimilation to the incorruptible, impassionate and virgin God and *theosis* are achieved. The imitation of the holiness of God and of *apatheia*⁶⁷ as a means towards assimilation to God is common teaching of Greek philosophy (mainly platonic philosophy), and of the Bible. The idea that by *apatheia*, which the Cappadocians connect with virginity, the soul can reach God is also found in Plato's *Phaedrus*, Plotinus, Basil of Ancara⁶⁸ and Methodius⁶⁹. It is interesting that Methodius points out that the very word virginity, *parthenia*, is closely related to the expression 'near God', *partheia*⁷⁰. 'Now the word *parthenia*, merely by changing one letter⁷¹, becomes *partheia*, and this is significant of the fact the virginity alone makes divine those who possess her and have been initiated into her pure mysteries.'⁷²

Moreover, virginity is connected with simplicity and oneness, as the virginity of God is connected with His simplicity and unity.⁷³ This is a concept

66. How important this is to Gregory is also shown in his speech *On Martyr Theodore* (PG 46,742CD), where the martyr answers the question of a heathen about birth in God: 'my God begets without passion': ('Εμπαθῶς μὲν ὁ ἐμός...Θεός οὐκ ἐγγένησεν.')

67. For a more detailed examination of the connection of *apatheia* and virginity see the third chapter of this thesis, part 3: Virginity and *Apatheia*.

68. In paragraphs 22 and 58 of his *On the True Purity of Virgins*, Basil of Ancara calls the virgin ἄγαλμα Θεοῦ (statue of God) and εἰκὼν Θεοῦ (image of God). But the idea of virginity in the Trinity is not found here.

69. Methodius of Olympus, *Symposium* 1,1 (SC 95,52-56); 1,4 (SC 95,62-64).

70. H.Musurillo remarks that there is an uncertainty in the text about this word, with the alternative of the word 'πανθειά'. In either case there is reference to the divinizing effect of virginity. But in the first reading the meaning would be 'next (παρά) to the divine'; in the second reading the meaning would be 'the all-embracing divinity', *The Symposium* (London, 1958), 219, n.3.

71. Not only has a letter been dropped, as the text tells us, but there is also a displacement of the v.

72. Methodius of Olympus, *Symposium* 8,1 (SC 95, 200-202).

73. Cf.A.Meredith, 'The Divine Simplicity, Contra Eunomium, 1.223-241', *El "Contra Eunomium I" en la produccion literaria de Gregorio de Nissa*, VI Coloquio Internacional sobre Gregorio de Nisa, (eds.) C.Mateo-Seco - J.Bastero (Pamplona, 1988), 339-351 for a study of divine simplicity in Nyssa's *Contra Eunomium*. The expression simplicity of God should not be misunderstood. More accurate expression is probably simplicity of the divine nature. Nyssa seldom refers to God as being simple. Rather, it is His nature or His essence which is simple.

common in Judaism and Platonism, and in the Gnostic tradition. Philo, Clement of Alexandria⁷⁴ and Origen follow in the same line. For Origen, the Fall is a fragmentation of the Spirit. Salvation is a process directed towards the recovery of metaphysical oneness. Virginité is the most essential attribute of the Christian, because it is the true image of the uniqueness of the divine nature.⁷⁵ With Jerome, too, God is simple; his letter to Eustochium describes the virginité of Mary as having made her *ad similitudinem Dei*. He also refers to the concept of spiritual disintegration. Praising virginité, he mentions the 'garment' which was woven from the top in one piece, but now is lost to the human race.⁷⁶

The Cappadocians follow this long tradition. For Gregory of Nyssa, virginité is the quality of detachment from the physical world that makes union with God possible, a mode of being whereby the soul is enabled to see the purity and simplicity of God through contemplating itself as the image of those divine attributes.⁷⁷ Gregory states that God is the fullness of goods, while the production of children accounts for fallen man's fundamental unlikeness to God. It was important for the Cappadocians not to permit the orthodox doctrine that the Father had '*begotten*' the Son to compromise in any way the fundamental metaphysical principle that the divine is characterized by *apatheia*. For because that divine and blessed nature was simple, uniform, and incomposite, it was devoid of any complicity or composition of dissimilars. However, the simplicity and unity of the divine nature do not preclude ontological distinctions in the Divine. Simplicity understood as absence of distinction is an idea alien to the thought of the Cappadocians.

Eunomius, on the other hand, speaks about the simplicity of the Trinity and he affirms that each one of the three 'substances', as he calls the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, is simple. Gregory argues that Eunomius is inconsistent at this point, since he also accepts that there is a relation of 'more and less' between the 'substances'. Though affirming their simplicity, by subordinating the Son and the

⁷⁴. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, 7,3 (BEIIEΣ 8, 249,14-253,26).

⁷⁵. R.Lawson, *Origen, The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies* (Westminster, Md. 1957), 129f.

⁷⁶. Jerome, *Ep.* 22,9 (PL 22,400).

⁷⁷. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man*, 16 (PG 44,181-184). Cf.B.Krivocheine, 'Simplicity of the Divine Nature and the Distinctions in God, According to St.Gregory of Nyssa', *St.Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 21, n.2 (1977), 76-104.

Holy Spirit to the Father, Eunomius implies that they are good only by participation, and thus really composite.⁷⁸

Eunomius also tries to prove that Basil, by admitting several names of God with different meanings, teaches a multiplicity and composition in the Godhead. Gregory of Nyssa rejects this contention: '... the divine nature, whatever it is, according to its essence is one, simple, uniform, and incomposite ...';⁷⁹ it is the human soul, which, at least in its present earthly condition, '...being unable to see clearly the object of its search, stretches out toward the Incomprehensible Nature through several concepts in different manners and ways...'⁸⁰. Every creature is composite, if compared to the absolute simplicity of God.⁸¹ Only God is totally simple and one. He alone comprehends all things within himself without complexity or change or contradiction. All that is not God, on the other hand, exists under the conditions of temporality and multiplicity. The further an individual being tends towards division and fragmentation, the more pronounced is its ontological lapse. Adam lived in imitation of the divine being in the integrity of the virgin state. But he fell from simplicity to multiplicity. He found himself devoid of that ontological virginity which was the likeness of the divine nature, a being now enmeshed in a world of time and space and carnal generation.

For the Cappadocians, any attempt to explain the Son's begetting and the Spirit's proceeding is an attempt to explain the ultimate mystery and it will drive everybody mad.⁸² For this reason they develop the notion of virginity of the Trinity and *apatheia*.⁸³ The introduction of the idea of virginity in the Trinity seems to be original to Nyssa and Nazianzen and represents their distinctive contribution in this field. Nyssa is probably the one who influenced Nazianzen in this respect. Nazianzen's moral poems, where we found the praise on virginity and the special reference on the virginity of God, were edited after his withdrawal from the episcopate. So they were work of his late life and they are certainly inspired by Nyssa. We cannot find explicit the same emphasis on the virginity of the Trinity in

⁷⁸. D.Balas, op.cit. 125.

⁷⁹. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 2,475 (GNO I, 364,32-365,2).

⁸⁰. Ibid. (GNO I, 365, 4-7). Cf. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.29,2* (SC 250,178-180) and *Or.29,10* (SC 250,196-198); F.Norris, op.cit. 40.

⁸¹. D.Balas, op. cit. 129.

⁸². Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.31,7-8* (SC 250,286-290).

⁸³. F.Norris, op.cit. 47.

Basil of Caesarea's writings, although one can find some allusions to the idea.⁸⁴ However, it is important to realize the extent to which Basil's works are open to such an idea. It has been suggested by some that the influence of those Gnostics who thought of God as virgin,⁸⁵ and stressed his oneness,⁸⁶ is evident in the Cappadocian exposition of the virginity of the Trinity. However, the notion of virginity in the Trinity, especially in Nyssa, is much more developed than in the Gnostic tradition and it is uniquely connected with the notion of immortality and apatheia. It is a virginity of the Trinity; of each person in the Trinity, not of a Gnostic God. It is virginity of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. This notion of virginity in the Trinity survived in Eastern theology and is found centuries later in Gregory Palamas.⁸⁷

For the Cappadocians, it is the mystery of the eternal begetting in the Trinity which gives significance to Christian virginity here below on earth. They see the entire divine economy, the whole chain of salvation in the light of virginity. This chain reaches from the three persons in the Trinity and the angelic powers of heaven to mankind as its last link. After the exposition of virginity as the life of the Trinity, we will examine in the next part the notion of virginity as the life of the angelic powers in heaven.

84. 'God is continence': ἐγκράτεια δοκεῖ ὁ Θεός εἶναι Basil of Caesarea, *Ep. 366* (R.Deferrari, iv 3,52) where, by purity and virginity we participate in God's grace. This is the opinion of B.Pottier, op.cit. 292. The meaning of the word ἐγκράτεια in this epistle includes the notion of virginity.

85. See in this respect P.Chrestou, ' "Enofylia", the ideal of Gnosticism', *Kleronomia* 5, (1973), 3f.

86. H.Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston, 1963), 59.

87. Gregory Palamas, *Πρός Ξένην μοναχήν*, Philocalia, v.4, (Athens, 1957), 120.

B.

VIRGINITY: THE LIFE OF THE ANGELS

The concept of virginity as the life of the angels was a common place of the early Christian theology.¹ Two ideas were closely connected with this concept. The first was that Christ's prophesised restoration of the world to its primal condition would inaugurate a millennium where men would live again as angels. The other was that those who lead a life of virginal perfection in the present life attain to, or even surpass, the angelic mode of existence. The former idea, connected as it was with a belief in an imminent second coming of the Messiah, was gradually to fade in importance, but the latter remained an extremely important concept of the theology surrounding virginity for centuries.

A life which renounces marriage is commonly portrayed in the early patristic literature as an attempt to imitate the life of angels.² The virgin life is πολιτεία ἁγγελική, an angelic life. Angels were asexual, with no trace of earthly flesh.³ After the resurrection there would be no more marriage, with its carnal obligations.⁴ Most of the early Fathers repeatedly stress that virginity reproduced the angelic life here on earth, and they wrote of it in such encomiastic terms that no one would think

¹. For a more detailed account of the equation of virginity and angelic life see: G.Columbas, *Paradis et vie angélique: le sens eschatologique de la vocation chrétienne* (Paris, 1961), 32-33; S.Frank, 'Ἀγγελικός βίος. Begriffsanalytische und begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum 'engelgleichen Leben' im frühen Mönchtum (Münster, 1964); A.Lamy, 'Βίος ἁγγελικός', *Dieu vivant* 7 (1966), 57-58; C.Paraskevaidis, *The Angelic State* (Athens, 1972).

². See T.Camelot, 'Les Traités "De Virginitate" au IV siècle', 285-286 for a summary of texts which portray virginity as an angelic life. See also, F.Bourassa, 'Excellence de la Virginité', 36-37.

³. Cf.C.Tsirpanlis, *Introduction to Eastern Patristic Thought and Orthodox Theology* (Collegeville, Minn. 1991), 150.

⁴. For a more detailed account of this idea see the next chapter, the Anthropology of Virginity.

the virgin life was anything less than a pure angelic existence.⁵ For Jerome the way to recapture the angelic life was to strive for an asexual existence -ideally virginity.⁶ For Ambrose, 'In holy virgins we see on earth the life of angels we lost in paradise'.⁷ But Ambrose makes the dichotomy even clearer: 'For chastity has made even angels. He who has preserved it is an angel; he who has lost it a devil.'⁸ The Cappadocians in their equation of virginity with the angelic life did not reach such extremes. Methodius of Olympus, trying to show that the aim of virginity is to attain the heavenly Eros, connects also the virgin life with the life of the angels. If love is otherwise dragged down to earth, owing to the weight of human nature, and adheres to its object, virginity gives it wings, so that it can mount up to the heavenly regions, 'to a pure atmosphere, and to the life which is akin to that of angels'.⁹ Virginity is an 'angelic transformation' of the body of man.¹⁰

Basil of Ancara develops the same idea: 'On the other hand, the virgin who has followed Him who leads to Paradise, already enjoys with Him in Paradise, being incorruptible.'¹¹ Basil argues that the virgin already possesses the likeness with the angels and incorruptibility. If at the resurrection they will neither marry, nor be given in marriage, but are like angels and will become sons of God, those who practice virginity already are angels, passing through human life in incorruptible flesh (ἐν ἀφθάρτοις σαρκί) by their virtue.¹² They have an incorruptibility equal to that of the angels (τὴν ἀφθαρσίαν ἰσάγγελον).¹³ For Basil of Ancara, a virgin will obtain, instead of a human name, the name of the immortal angels, that will not die. They will have the most beautiful place in heaven and the nature and the immortal dignity of the angels, 'so that they have no need of succession, for they find

⁵. J.Salisbury, *Church Fathers, Independent Virgins* (London, 1991), 14.

⁶. Cf. Jerome's epistle *To Eustochium* for association of virginity with the angelic life.

⁷. Ambrose, *De institutione virginis*, civ (PL 16,345).

⁸. Ambrose, *De Virginibus* (PL 16,214A).

⁹. Methodius of Olympus, *Symposium* 8,2 (SC 95, 204-206). Cf. A.Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (London, 1982), 417.

¹⁰. Methodius of Olympus, *Symposium* 2,7 (SC 95,86).

¹¹. Basil of Ancara, *On the True Purity of Virgins*, 54 (PG 30,777C).

¹². It is interesting to note that for Basil of Ancara male virgins have gone over to the order of the angels, but female virgins have been lifted up to the same dignity only insofar as, in this present life, they are equal to the men with their soul. In this world their equality is still shadowed by their female body, though they have laid down the qualities of their bodies for the intercourse of male and female. That is why already here they show themselves equal to the angels. This difference between male and female virgins is not found in the Cappadocian teaching on virginity as the angelic life.

¹³. Cf. T.Zeses, *op.cit.* 186; T.van Eijk, *op.cit.* 225-226.

everlasting satisfaction in themselves, enjoying a permanent life that takes the place of succeeding generations.'¹⁴

The connection of virginity with the angelic life -found also in John Chrysostom¹⁵, Athanasius¹⁶ and Eusebius of Emessa¹⁷- contributed to the development of the equation of the celibate life with the angelic life and became an extremely important concept of the theology of virginity not only for the fourth century, but also for the following centuries.¹⁸

The Cappadocians accepted, but developed further the idea of virginity as the life of angels. Their interpretation of virginity as the angelic life is certainly influenced by monastic practices which Basil learned in his travels in Syria and Egypt and from his time under Eustathius of Sebaste, Basil's master in the ascetic life, who had established monasteries after the Egyptian pattern in Pontus, Roman Armenia, and Paflagonia. However, Basil and the two Gregories rejected in their system the extreme ideas of Gnosticism and modified the rigours of the Syrian and Egyptian types of asceticism in keeping with their innate classical sense of moderation. They preserved though the idea that through virginity the virgin is able partially to free himself from the conditions of corporeal existence. He becomes angelic, disembodied, or 'as if' disembodied, and steps beyond the physical conditions of common life.¹⁹ In this 'as if' disembodied state he anticipates the angelic state, the state of existence as pure spirit.²⁰

Cappadocian theology makes a fundamental distinction between a nature that was 'material and perceptible by the senses' shared by humanity with the physical

¹⁴. Basil of Ancara, *On the true Purity of Virgins*, 60 (PG 30,792BC).

¹⁵. John Chrysostom, *On Virginity*, 10,3-11 (SC 125,124,23-34); 79,1 (SC 125,376,1-3).

¹⁶. Athanasius, *On Virginity*, 24 (PG 28,280D): "Ὁ ἐγκράτεια, ἀγγέλων βίος καὶ ἀγίων ἀνθρώπων στέφανος".

¹⁷. Cf.D.Amand, 'La virginité chez Eusèbe d'Émèse et l'askétisme familial dans la première moitié du IV^e siècle', 777-820.

¹⁸. Cf.B.Krivocheine, 'Angels and Demons in the Eastern Orthodox Spiritual Tradition', *The Angels of Light and the Powers of Darkness*, E.Mascall (ed.) (London, 1955), 22-46; L.Milis, *Angelic Monks and Earthly Men, Monasticism and its Meaning to Medieval Society* (The Boydell Press, 1992); John Damascenus, "Ἐκθεσις Ὁρθοδόξου πίστεως, 4,24; Gregory Palamas, *Πρὸς Ξένην μοναχήν*, Philocalia v.4, (Athens, 1957), 97.

¹⁹. Cf.H.Musurillo, 'The Problem of Ascetical Fasting in the Greek Patristic Writers', *Traditio* 12 (1956), 1-64, for another dimension of this disembodied state in the case of the abstinence of food, where there are enough references on the Cappadocian Fathers.

²⁰. R.Ruether, op.cit. 147; B.Otis, op.cit.108f.

world, and a nature that was 'rationally intelligible and non material' shared by humanity with God and the angels. The angels are not 'pure spirits', yet they do not have a biological condition similar to ours, and know neither mortality, nor reproduction. They have no 'tunics of skin' and were created before the visible world, but not 'in the image of God'.²¹ The Cappadocian doctrine of angels furnished a model and guide for ascetic discipline, a discipline defined as 'the art in the science of the more divine life, teaching those living in the body to achieve an approximation of that non corporeal life.'²² That ascetic way of life in the form of virginity served as an 'imitation of the angelic life' as for example Macrina (Gregory of Nyssa's and Basil of Caesarea's sister) lived and every virgin lived.²³

For the Cappadocians, virginity as 'apatheia' is the distinctive characteristic of all the bodiless angelic powers.²⁴ The angels were created by God before the visible world²⁵ to communicate the thoughts and aspirations of man to the Creator and to make known the will of God among men. They are bodiless spirits, for 'a spirit has not flesh and bones'²⁶ and have no sex. Involved in the struggle against the demonic powers of the cosmos, they represent, in a way, the ideal side of creation. It is the work and the constant care of those bodiless powers to view the Father of incorruptibility and to beautify their own self according to the first beauty (ἀρχέτυπον κάλλος).²⁷ Gregory Nazianzen emphasizes: 'Are you ranked among the unyoked?'²⁸ 'Surely it is angelic that she who is bound to flesh should live not according to flesh, but be loftier than her nature'.²⁹ One reason for adopting virginity is that God and the angels are virgins.³⁰ Thus, it is clear that for the Cappadocians also the angels are a perfect example of virginity. They are freed from marriage, the

21. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 38,9 (SC 358,120-122). Cf.C.Tsirpanlis, *op.cit.* 37; R.Ruether, *op.cit.* 131f.

22. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 4,9,6-8 (GNO VIII,I, 277,1-3).

23. However, an angelic way of life can also be shared by married people, as Gorgonia (Nazianzen's sister). Cf.C.Christakis, 'Macrina and Gorgonia: Two Mothers of the Orthodox Church', *Orthodox Herald* 64-65 (1994), 28.

24. Ibid. 2,1,11-13 (GNO VIII,I, 253,19-21); 14,4,15-20 (GNO VIII,I, 309, 10-15); Cf.O.Knackstedt, *op.cit.* 27-28; G.Söll, *op.cit.* 430.

25. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.*38,9 (SC 358,120).

26. Lk. 24,39b.

27. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, chapters 1 and 2.

28. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.*37,10 (SC 318,292): 'μετά τῶν ἀζύγων ἐτάχθης;' Cf.J.Rousse, 'Les anges et leur ministère selon Saint Grégoire de Nazianze', *Mélanges de science religieuse* 22 (1965), 133-152 for an exposition of Nazianzen's teaching on the angels.

29. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.*37,11 (SC 318,294).

30. Cf.E.Bellini, *op.cit.* 455.

concerns and pains of life and the divisions of gender. They have only one desire, to be with God, enjoy his presence and remain single, pure servants of the pure God. 'Virginity is placed among them'; 'A great thing is virginity and celibacy, a being ranked with the angels'.³¹

Gregory of Nyssa, following the text of Galatians 3,28 (in the risen Christ there is neither male nor female), suggested that the restoration would end the distinction between the sexes and repair all the lesser ontological divisions that were the effects of the Fall.³² He holds that virginity has the power to reconstitute the lost state of human nature.³³ The angelic life of the last age found its scriptural basis in Luke 20,34-36 where Christ replies to the question of the Sadducees over the problem of polyandry after this life: 'The children of this world marry and are given in marriage. But those who shall be accounted worthy of that world and of the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor take wives. For neither shall they be able to die any more, for they are equal to the angels (ἰσάγγελοι) and are Sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.'³⁴ This passage links explicitly the angelic life with virginity, but also it connects those two concepts with immunity from death.³⁵ This is the eschatological role of virginity: The resurrection would open upon an era of peace and timelessness, devoid of death, multiplicity, and change. This aspect seems to be less represented in the Latin Fathers.³⁶

31. 'Μέγα παρθενία καί ἀζυγία καί τό μετ' ἀγγέλων τετάχθαι καί τῆς μοναδικῆς φύσεως' *Or.* 43,62 (SC 384,258); *In Laudem Virginitatis*, 1-55 (PG 37, 521-526); *Exhortatio ad virgines*, 5-10 (PG 37,633A), *De Pudicitia* 3-6 (PG 37,644A): 'Τοσοῦτον προέχει τοῦ γάμου ἢ παρθενία ὅσον τῆς γῆς ὁ οὐρανός καί τῶν ἀνθρώπων οἱ ἄγγελοι'. Cf. J. Rousse, *op.cit.* 150-151.

32. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man*, 17 (PG 44,188-189). Cf. A. Cameron, 'Neither Male nor Female', *Greece and Rome* 27 (1980), 64.

33. Cf. T. Hopko, 'Galatians 3:28: An Orthodox Interpretation', *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 35 (1991), 169-186.

34. Cf. Mt. 22,30, Mk. 12,25; G. Columbas, *op.cit.* 145, n.I. Cf. E. Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London, 1950), 58.

35. Clement of Alexandria informs us that the Gnostics were the first to use this passage to praise virginity, *Stromateis* 3,6 (ΒΕΠΕΣ 8,27). Clement [*Stromateis* 7,12 (ΒΕΠΕΣ 8,27)] and Origen [*Against Kelsos* 4,29 (SC 136,252)] introduced the general idea that by virtue and perfection we are becoming 'ἰσάγγελοι'. For an account of Clement's teaching in this respect see J. Broudéhoux, *op.cit.* 104f. Some see Plotinus' influence on Gregory of Nyssa's theory of virginity as the angelic life. Cf. *Ennead* 3,5,2: 'ὅτι μηδ' ἐν οὐρανῷ γάμοι'. However, this is very unlikely since the phrase is less strong than the scriptural passage and not well supported by the context. Cf. T. Zeses, *op.cit.* 189.

36. The Augustinian tradition did not embrace as much this view of the eschatological role of virginity. Cf. J. Bugge, *op.cit.* 32.



The virgin leads a life that is essentially an anticipation of the angelic life of heaven. For Basil of Caesarea: 'He who has chosen the angelic life has raised himself to an incorporeal manner of living, since he has surpassed the ordinary possibilities of human nature. For it belongs properly to the nature of the angels to be freed from the society of marriage and not to let themselves be turned aside to the contemplation of any other beauty than that of the divine face.'³⁷ For Basil, to imitate the life of angels on earth is the most desirable. The virgins are the earthly angels, 'ἐπίγειοι ἄγγελοι'.

The equation of virginity with the angelic life is one of the ways the Cappadocians try to show the greatness of the virgin life. The angels see 'face to face', 'πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον' and are in the service of those who are going to inherit the salvation. Those who live a life dedicated to God are imitating the angels. The virgin in Christ is a citizen of heavens. Moreover, the virginal life in this world is in fact more meritorious than that of the angel in heaven.³⁸ Angels do not share in the handicap which men suffer under through the temptations of the world and flesh. The virginity of a fallen man is a hardwon achievement, while that of the angels is the created state in which they continue to reside.³⁹ This view is wrongly considered semipelagianistic by some.⁴⁰ It is rather founded in the idea that some justice resides in awarding a higher place to the aggressively virginal than to the angels, who sit idly by, as it were, already gifted with virginity. The view is relevant to an important motif in ascetic literature, that of the virgin as 'soldier of Christ'. It is virginity that makes the virgin equal in rank to the angels already enlisted on the side of Christ in the cosmic struggle against the forces of darkness. The individual monk was thought to lead the life of an angel ultimately because the essence of angelic life was virginity.⁴¹

³⁷. Basil of Caesarea, *Sermo asceticus*, 2 (PG 31,873B). Monastic literature is full of the idea that the virgin leads a life that is essentially an anticipation of the angelic life of heaven. The notion prevails from the earliest days of Egyptian monasticism down to the twelfth century and beyond.

³⁸. A champion of virgins over angels is also John Chrysostom [*On Virginity* 10-11 (PG 48,540-541)] who admits that angels remain untouched by concupiscence, but asserts the same is also true of virgins, who have to conquer their flesh to achieve that state. Cf. J. Bugge, *op.cit.* 34.

³⁹. Cyprian writes that 'virginity makes itself the equal of the angels, in fact, ... it even excels them, for it gains the victory against nature in the besieged flesh, which angels do not possess' *De disciplina et bono pudicitiae*, 7 (PL 4,855).

⁴⁰. Cf. J. Bugge, *op.cit.* 34. Bugge's treatment of the concept of the angelic life is helpful, although he overconcentrates on 'gnosis'.

⁴¹. 'The primary condition of the angelic life is a perfect chastity. Tradition has always been pleased to designate this virtue as the virtue which the angels exemplify and help to preserve.' J. Leclercq,

For the Cappadocians virginity approximates the life of angels by eliminating desires of the body and renouncing marriage, property, and power in order to be free to cultivate the life of the mind and direct desire solely toward union with God. As such, therefore, the angelic life is an answer to the question of how best to manage the movements of the soul.⁴² Gregory of Nyssa in his *On Virginity* defines the human being as a 'rational animal' (τό λογικόν τοῦτο καί διανοητικόν ζῶον ὁ ἄνθρωπος)⁴³ and reflects upon what this means for the management of the activities of the soul. Moderation consists in finding a mean, a point of balance, between both dimensions of human nature, rational and animal.⁴⁴ Consequently the question that is raised is whether the angelic life of the renunciant leads to the highest possible harmony of body and soul at which the life of virtue aims. Nyssa's treatise *On Virginity* is a reflection of human wholeness and how to attain it and Nyssa examines the celibate and married lives in the light of this standard.

In this sense we can speak about a 'criticism' of the 'angelic life' by Gregory of Nyssa.⁴⁵ Despite his concern to persuade us to practise virginity, clear is also his concern for moderation. A life in response to the Gospel requires that we moderate not only our desires for bodily pleasures and possessions, but our desire for the 'angelic' way of life as well, especially where 'angelic life' is characterized by the desire for tranquillity and exemption from the duties of bodily life.

We cannot take Gregory too literally at the end of chapter 14 in his *On Virginity*, when he speaks of the blessing of the resurrection as the imitation of angelic freedom from marriage, as to take him too literally on this point would contradict what he has said elsewhere in the same treatise.⁴⁶ It is interesting though to compare at this point Clement of Alexandria's view that the true gnostic can be married and equal to angels.⁴⁷ Although Gregory speculates in his *On the Creation of Man* that humans would have propagated like the angels had they remained in

The Life of Perfection (Collegeville, Minn. 1961), 28. Later for John of the Ladder even the angels admire those who exercise virginity for their struggle, *Philocalia* v.2, (Athens, 1957), 269.

⁴². M.Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 44.

⁴³. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 12,2,1 (GNO VIII, I, 297,24).

⁴⁴. Ibid. 7,2,15-29 (GNO VIII, I, 283,14-284,3).

⁴⁵. Cf. M.Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 46.

⁴⁶. Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, chapter 8.

⁴⁷. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 7,12 (BEPPE 8,282).

paradise,⁴⁸ it seems that the only means of procreation available to humanity in the post-lapsarian economy is through bodily intercourse and bodily birth.⁴⁹ As it is necessary for us according to Nyssa's teaching to complete the number of human beings in this way before everything is restored in the resurrection,⁵⁰ procreation is both good and necessary. He states in his *Catechetical Oration*, 'nothing is dishonourable or wicked in these contributions toward sustaining life'.⁵¹

Thus, the theory of the angelic propagation may need a different interpretation. Gregory tells us that God created male and female by divine foreknowledge,⁵² and that 'community and kinship with the irrational nature is for the human being a provision for procreation' (ἐπιγεννηματικήν).⁵³ Then he says, 'Only the eye-witnesses of the truth and servants of reason may see the reason for this device, but we, to the extent possible, by imagining the truth through conjectures and images, will not expose what comes to mind with a straightforward statement but will set it forth in the form of an exercise for those who consider prudently what they hear.'⁵⁴ A bit later, as he begins to speak of the freedom from marriage in paradise, he says again, 'However, in these matters again the true reason, whatever it is, can be clear only to those who, according to Paul, have been initiated into the unspeakable things of paradise, but we on the other hand, think as follows'.⁵⁵

The whole theory of angelic propagation in paradise comes only after Gregory has indicated that he is dealing more with images than with the truth which those who have experienced what he means by paradise know more adequately. Angelic propagation is thus perhaps a veiled way of speaking of the passionless generation proper to the mind. Man is angelic when the ἔρως of the mind is directed toward understanding and participating in what truly is and propagates 'angelically' when it

48. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man*, chapters 16-22.

49. Cf. N. Matsoukas, 'The "double creation" in the work of Gregory of Nyssa', *Kleronomia* 21, (1989), 184.

50. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man*, 22 (PG 44,250BC).

51. Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration*, 28 (PG 45,73B). Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, 2,23 (SC 38,140), where there is the argument of goodness of marriage for συντελέωσις.

52. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man*, 16,14 (PG 44,185A).

53. Ibid. 16,9 (PG 44,181B-C).

54. 'Τό ἐπὶ νοῦν ἔλθον οὐκ ἀποφαντικῶς ἐκτιθέμεθα, ἀλλ' ὡς ἐν γυμνασίᾳς εἶδει τοῖς εὐγνώμοσι τῶν ἀκρωμένων προσθήσωμεν', *ibid.* 16,15 (PG 44,185A).

55. Ibid. 17,2 (PG 44,188B).

initiates others into the life of the mind. Man propagates in a 'beast-like' fashion whenever its inclination is toward what is material (τό ὑλῶδες).⁵⁶

Virginity as the life of the angels in Cappadocian thought certainly excludes any form of sexual expression which is in modern times referred to as 'genital'. Does this necessarily mean that virgins are turned into angels, or become 'merely human' without a sexual dimension and expression to their being and life? Virgins cannot but remain human. Their gender and sexuality remain part of their physical life. But, it is rather consecrated and integrated into their spiritual life. It is an integral element in their relationships with other people. But the way in which virgins love God and their neighbours excludes 'genital' sexual activity and intercourse of any sort. Because of this they are not deprived of anything essential to human fulfilment, for love need not be expressed in a genital manner.

On the other hand, while the virgins are completely continent in regard to 'genital' activity, they are fully 'sexual' in their spiritual lives which necessarily include bodily actualization and expression. The virgins are healthy men and women who often have deep significant relationships with the persons of the other gender. We need only to point to the women who inspired the Cappadocians' doctrines and actions.

It is also interesting to note that although the equation of virginity with the angelic life is usually related by the Cappadocians with the lack of passion, there is a point where Nazianzen refers to it as a passion speaking about his eros for the life of calm and retirement, his longing for the life of virginity:

'For nothing seemed to me so desirable as to close the doors of my senses, and escaping from the flesh and the world, collected within myself (εἰς ἑαυτόν συστραφέντα), having no further connection than what was absolutely necessary with human affairs, and speaking to myself and to God, to live superior to visible things, ever preserving in myself the divine impressions pure and unmixed with the erring tokens below, and both being and constantly growing more and more to be, a real unspotted mirror of God and divine things, as light is added to light, and what was still dark grew clearer, enjoying already by hope the good of the age to come, roaming about with the angels, even now being above the earth by having forsaken it, and stationed on high by the

⁵⁶. Ibid. 17,2 (PG 44,189D-192A). Cf. M.Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 294.

Spirit. If any of you has been possessed by this longing, he knows what I mean and will excuse my passion at that time (καί τῷ τότε πάθει συγγνώσεται).⁵⁷

At this point Nazianzen describes the nature of the conflict he faced upon his ordination to the priesthood, a conflict between civic and contemplative lifestyles.⁵⁸ He preferred a private life of retirement to a public life in service of the church not out of a sense of duty, but out of desire for a deeper union with God to which the cares of office would only be a hindrance. He recognised that this choice is in some sense shameful, for it seems to choose private benefit over the common good. In the end he chooses service over his erotic inclinations. His example indicates that, just as personal desires for pleasure, wealth, or power can stand in opposition to the common good, so does the desire for an angelic life. In other words, the angelic life itself can be a form of attachment and passion, concepts diametrically opposite to the notion of virginity.⁵⁹

Furthermore, virginity is called by Gregory of Nyssa a 'public patron':

'For, if the life which is promised by the Lord to the just after the resurrection is one "equal to angels", and if what is proper to angelic nature is to be free from marriage, then he has already received the beautiful things, of that promise, mingling with the splendour of the saints and imitating the purity of the incorporeal by the immaculate character of his life. Therefore, if virginity becomes a sponsor (public patron) (πρόξενος) of such things, what treatise could ever express the admiration this grace deserves?'⁶⁰

Those who live their lives in virginity function with the Christian community as an image or icon of the beatitude which the gospel promises in the ages to come in which death is banished from life. Virginity thus has a certain value for the whole community and is not simply an escape from civic duties. The presence within the Christian community of people living celibate lives serves to remind it of the higher, spiritual aspirations which should guide its communal life, aspirations which are easily lost once it is immersed in child-raising and one's business in the world.

⁵⁷. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.2,7* (SC 247,96).

⁵⁸. For a further discussion of this conflict see chapter four part C: Marriage and Virginity - Civic and Contemplative Lives.

⁵⁹. Cf. M. Hart, *Marriage Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 68. Cf. chapter 3 for Gregory of Nyssa's concept of *apatheia* in this respect.

⁶⁰. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 14,4 (GNO VIII,I, 309,10-19).

Moreover, virginity promotes an experience of resurrected life within those who practise it such that they experience the parousia, the awaited 'second coming' or, to translate literally 'presence' of God now rather than expecting that experience only to occur as some future event which occurs after an undetermined number of generations. Furthermore, just as virgins experience the presence of God in this present life, so are their lives 'equal to angels' in their freedom from marriage and purity of life.

Finally in essential agreement with the two Gregories Basil of Caesarea does not understand the angelic life in a narrow sense either. According to him the life of isolation and the angelic life cannot be achieved in neglect of the life of community.⁶¹ It was possible for a Christian dedicated to the angelic life to lead a life that was active and community-minded. Basil himself assumed so many roles, of the theologian defending the teachings of the church against heresy, of the educator of the Christian community, and of the bishop overseeing a diocese. However, the angelic life according to him opposes the love of one's own, and attachment to one's particular family and group, which community life usually involves. Gregory of Nyssa says about Basil in his encomium of his brother upon his death: 'His family was intimacy with the divine, and his fatherland was virtue'.⁶² Basil 'transferred his citizenship from earth to heaven'.⁶³ His detachment from family and fatherland in the angelic life ensured not only his own tranquillity and union with God, but his ability to serve the church as well.

The theology of virginity, as the life of the Trinity and as the life of the angelic powers in heaven, becomes the starting point of the Cappadocian teaching on virginity. In the following, the two basic concepts of the Cappadocian anthropology are going to be discussed: 'the image of God' and the notion of the 'garments of skin'. Both of them will be examined in two parts: a) creation of man - virginity in paradise b) fall of man - loss of virginity and introduction of marriage. Thus, hopefully the interpretation of the postlapsarian state of man and the meaning and significance of virginity are going to be clarified.

⁶¹. Basil exemplified in himself his ideal for activity. Cf. *Sermon 6 on Luke 12,16* (PG 31,262-278); *Sermon 7 on Matthew 19,16-26* (PG 31,278-304); and *Sermon 2 on Psalm 14* (PG 29,264-280).

⁶². Gregory of Nyssa, *On his brother Basil* (GNO X,I, 132,5-6).

⁶³. Ibid. (GNO X,I, 134,6-7).

CHAPTER TWO

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF VIRGINITY

The purpose of this section is not to develop an exhaustive account of the Cappadocian Anthropology. The aim is to present indispensable elements of this Anthropology in connection with the notion of virginity. The Theology of virginity is the first step in the Cappadocian teaching on virginity. The second step is the anthropology of virginity, that is the connection of virginity with the creation of man (*ἄνθρωπος*) in the image and likeness of God and with man's fall.

In general literature on the early Christian theology the three Cappadocians are known mainly for their contribution in the field of Trinitarian theology and Christology. In the field of anthropology, their teaching is less well known, and in the common literature on this period it is generally just hinted or not observed. Of the three, Gregory of Nyssa has worked more thoroughly with the question of man, and his anthropology is the object of a certain number of studies.¹ However, a comprehensive synthesis of Nyssa's anthropology still needs to be done.²

It is widely acknowledged that the Anthropology of the Cappadocian Fathers, that is, their teaching on the nature and destiny of man, is founded on two great

1. See, for Gregory of Nyssa: H.v.Balthasar, op.cit.; A.Armstrong, 'Platonic Elements in St. Gregory of Nyssa's Doctrine of Man', *Dominican Studies* 1 (1948), 113-126; idem, 'The Nature of Man in St. Gregory of Nyssa', *Eastern Churches Quarterly* 8 (1949), 2-9; G.Ladner, 'The Philosophical Anthropology of Saint Gregory of Nyssa', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 12 (1958), 59-94; R.Leys, *L'image de Dieu chez Saint Grégoire de Nysse*; C.Scouteris, *Consequences of the Fall and the Laver of Regeneration*; S.deBoer, *De anthropologie van Gregorius van Nyssa* (Assen, 1968); H.Oesterle, 'Probleme der Anthropologie bei Gregor von Nyssa', *Hermes* 113 (1985), 101-114; V.Harrison, *Grace and Human Freedom according to St. Gregory of Nyssa*, Diss. (Graduate Theological Union, 1986). For Basil of Caesarea: O.Papadopoulou-Tsanana, *The Anthropology of Basil the Great* (Thessalonica, 1970); D.Tsamis, *The Protology of Basil the Great* (Thessalonica, 1970); M. Orphanos, op.cit.; P.Rousseau, op.cit. 318-349. For Gregory Nazianzen: J.Szymusiak, *L'homme et sa destinée selon Grégoire le Théologien* (Paris, 1958); idem, *Éléments de théologie de l'homme selon Grégoire de Nazianze* (Rome, 1963); H.Althaus, *Die Heilslehre des heiligen Gregor von Nazianz* (Münster, 1972); D.Winslow, op.cit.; A.Ellverson, op.cit.

2. R.Williams, 'Macrina's Deathbed Revisited: Gregory of Nyssa on Mind and Passion', L.Wickham & C.Bammel, (eds.), *Christian Faith and Greek Philosophy in Late Antiquity*. Essays in Tribute to G.C.Stead in celebration of his eightieth birthday (Leiden, 1993), 227.

traditions: the biblical doctrine of man's creation and reformation after the image and likeness of God, and the Greek philosophical conception of *paideia* and *askesis* as means toward the assimilation of man to God.³ It is above the scope of the present research to examine the Cappadocian Anthropology as a whole. However, it is necessary to see some basic points of this Anthropology, since the Cappadocian teaching on virginity is closely connected with fundamental anthropological ideas.

The Cappadocian Fathers do not present any anthropological system. However, while being focused on divine truths, their theology constantly speaks of man according to the principles of correspondence 'to the image'.⁴ Gregory of Nyssa is the only one among the Cappadocian Fathers who wrote a systematic anthropological treatise: *On the Creation of Man*. It is true that the depth of this work makes the Bishop of Nyssa the natural center of any account of Cappadocian Anthropology.⁵ Gregory's aim was to integrate the contrasting views of man suggested by the account of creation and his actual state at present by combining natural knowledge with biblical exegesis. His starting point was the Genesis narrative of creation, but like Basil in his *Hexaemeron* he used contemporary science to fill out what scripture had to say.⁶ However, the contribution of Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus should not be underestimated.⁷ In them, one finds isolated passages or statements related to the idea of the nature of man. Basil did not write a special anthropological treatise although he promised to do so;⁸ Gregory of Nyssa composed his *On the Creation Of Man* with the special purpose of completing his brother's work. Two of Basil's sermons with anthropological material, *De hominis structura* (PG 30,9-61) and *De paradiso* (PG 30,61-72), are a matter of dispute among scholars.⁹ However, important anthropological material can be found in Basil's other writings.¹⁰ The same can be said about Gregory Nazianzen's

³. G.Ladner, op.cit, 61.

⁴. P.Evdokimov, *Woman and the Salvation of the World*, 31.

⁵. G.Ladner, op.cit. 61. Gregory of Nyssa's theology of man's creation and fall seems liable to more than one interpretations. For a survey of these interpretations see, S.DeBoer, op.cit. 103-113. Cf. also E.Gilson, op.cit. 56-59.

⁶. F.Young, 'Adam and Anthropolos. A study of the Interaction of Science and the Bible in two Anthropological Treatises of the Fourth Century', *Vigiliae Christianae* 37 (1983), 111.

⁷. It is usual in the studies of the anthropology of the Fathers to see a gap from Origen to Gregory of Nyssa.

⁸. Basil of Caesarea, *In Hexaemeron* 8,2 and 9,6 (PG 29,165D); (PG 29,168A); (PG 29,204B); (PG 29,208A).

⁹. Cf.J.Quasten, *Patrology* v.III, 219; 263-264; A.Smets-M.Esbroek, *Basile de Césarée: Sur l'origine de l'homme* (Hom. X et XI de l'Hexaemeron) (SC 160, 13-26).

¹⁰. O.Papadopoulou-Tsanana, op.cit. 13.

contribution to anthropology,¹¹ since rich anthropological material can be found in his Orations, Poems and Letters.

Basil's anthropology can be called ascetic. We do not find in it the poetic expression of Nazianzen, the philosophical insight of Nyssa or the mystical atmosphere of both. G.Ladner summarizes magnificently the personal characteristics of the Anthropology of each one of the Cappadocians.¹² 'St. Basil's attitude toward the imperfections and transitoriness of terrestrial human life was harsher, his anthropology more severe, than that of the two Gregories. He was rather the active legislator of the very way of life which was their common ideal. His younger brother of Nyssa was its great theoretician. His friend of Nazianzus embraced both praxis and *theoria*, but in a very personal way, which was neither that of the hierarch Basil nor that of Gregory of Nyssa, who though a mystic, was also a systematic thinker.'¹³ The differences between them were perhaps not really as great as they may seem.¹⁴

The anthropology of the Cappadocian Fathers has two fundamental concepts which make possible the interpretation of the postlapsarian state of man and clarify the meaning and significance of virginity. The first is the 'image of God', the second the deeply significant notion of 'the garments of skin'. I suggest to study both of them in the following pages examining briefly the Cappadocian teaching on the creation of man and on man's fall and tracing the Anthropology of Virginity.

¹¹. D.Tsamis, *The Dialectical Character of the Teaching of Gregory the Theologian* (Thessalonica, 1969), 11-14.

¹². G.Ladner, *op.cit.* 77.

¹³. Ibid. See also D.Amand, *L'ascèse monastique de Saint Basile*, 66f.

¹⁴. Cf.D.Tsames, *The Protology of Basil the Great*, 110.

A .

CREATION - VIRGINITY IN PARADISE

The Cappadocian teaching on creation is firmly rooted in the biblical doctrine of creation where God is seen as transcendent yet has a living relationship with his creatures. This basis distances the Cappadocian teaching from any Platonic dualism. The starting point of their teaching on creation is the Johannine metaphor of light: 'God is light' and although this light in its essence can neither be 'mentally conceived nor verbally articulated', it is nevertheless the property of light to shine beyond itself and to illumine.¹ God was not content, merely to contemplate himself, for this would not have satisfied his desire to pour himself out beyond himself, thereby multiplying the objects of his love.² It was for this reason that God expressed himself in the divinely gracious act of creation. It is at this point that Origen's anthropology is modified in Cappadocian thought. The pre-existence of the human soul as part of the spiritual creation is rejected and is replaced by the scheme of man's creation after the creation of the material world.³

God created man last and placed him on earth as in a house all prepared for him that he might behold some of the wonders above and about him and be lord and

¹. Gregory Nazianzen, Or.40 (SC 358,204); A.Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 43. See G.Florovsky, 'The idea of Creation in Christian Philosophy', *The Eastern Churches Quarterly* VIII (1949), 53-77 and J.Meyendorff, 'Creation in the History of Orthodox Theology', *St.Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* (1983) 1, 27-37 for an account of Patristic theology on creation and its connection with modern orthodox theology.

². Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man* (PG 44,125); Basil of Caesarea, *In Hexaemeron* 9 (PG 29,3). For a good account of Basil's doctrine of creation see, G.Dragas, 'La doctrine de la création d'après l'Hexaéméron de saint Basile le Grand', *Istina* (1983) n. 3, 282-308.

³. Cf.A.Meredith, 'Origen's De Principiis and Gregory of Nyssa's Oratio Catechetica', *Heythrop Journal* XXXVI (1995), 4-5. For the general connection of Nyssa with Origen see G.Barrois, 'The Alleged Origenism of St.Gregory of Nyssa', *St.Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 30 (1986), 7-16.

master; all this that he might come to know God as the author of the things he was to enjoy; and from the beauty and the majesty of the universe he might know the power of the maker.⁴ And since man was to rule and use some things of earth and to rise to a knowledge of God by viewing its wonders, He gives man a twofold nature, blending the divine and the earthly that he may be equipped to enjoy each, to enjoy God through his spiritual nature and the goods of the earth by the senses which are related to them.⁵

Man is placed midway between the sensible and intelligible in order to establish an inner harmony in creation, whereby a lower order is joined to the next higher order. Below man we find inanimate nature, next things endowed with vegetable life, next those with sensible life; each of the latter two embraces and includes the nature of the order immediately below it.⁶ Man made of dust, but possessing a soul gathers up in himself all the lower orders of creation.⁷ And by his intelligible nature he is to reach up to the divine.⁸ He is lord and head of all creation below him and is destined to reach God and enjoy Him by contemplation proceeding from and based on a virtuous life. And it is in view of each of these two functions of man that he was made in the image and likeness of God.

Trying to find in the Cappadocian teaching a clear definition of what it is in man which corresponds to the divine image, we run the risk of 'losing ourselves amidst varying assertions, which though not contradictory, cannot be applied to any part of human nature'.⁹ As Gregory of Nyssa writes, since God is incomprehensible it can only be that His image within man is also incomprehensible.¹⁰

⁴. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man*, 2 (PG 44,132D-133A); Basil of Caesarea, *In Hexaemeron* 1,11 and 5,9 (PG 29,28AB) and (PG 29,116B).

⁵. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man*, 2 (PG 44,133B).

⁶. Gregory Nazianzen, *In Laudem Virginitatis*, 96-97 (PG 37,529); *Exhortatio ad virgines*, 14-18 (PG 37,634A); *De virtute*, 68-71 (PG 37,672).

⁷. Basil of Caesarea, *Against Eunomius*, 2,19 (SC 305,80).

⁸. Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration*, 6 (PG 45,25B-28A); *On the Creation of Man*, 8 PG (44,144D-148C); Basil of Caesarea, *In Hexaemeron*, 6,1 (PG 29,117D-120A); Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.45,7* (PG 36,632AB).

⁹. V.Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London, 1957), 115; Cf.M.Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 272. On the concept of the 'image' see G.Ladner, 'The Concept of the Image in the Greek Fathers and the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 7 (1953), 3-34; T. Camelot, 'La théologie de l' image de Dieu', *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 40 (1956), 443-471.

¹⁰. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man*, 11 (PG 44,153D-156B). Nyssa describes the content of the image of God in man in various ways: J.Daniélou, *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique*, 53-60; J.Muckle, 'The doctrine of St.Gregory of Nyssa on Man as the Image of God', *Medieval Studies* 7

The doctrine of the image is not a revolutionary doctrine,¹¹ but it is stamped by the Cappadocians' own thought. After being made in God's image and likeness, man is placed over creation¹² in imitation of God's sovereignty. Being so constituted, man bears within himself all the divine attributes, especially participation in God's purity and remoteness from evil. For Nyssa the natural man is created by God with all his endowments, purity, love, detachment. Opposed to this natural life is the animal life which is added upon the image. Thus, man is good by nature. Restoration of this image forms the central theme of the Cappadocian writings.¹³

Of the three Cappadocians, Gregory of Nyssa does not make a distinction between the terms *εἰκών* (image) of God given to man in creation and *ὁμοίωσις* (likeness) which man himself should acquire. They express for him one notion.¹⁴ The likeness is in the image, an image is like its archetype; image and likeness together mean the likeness in or of an image. Just as a statue or portrait, if it is a good one, is like the person portrayed, so man as the image of God is like God; he imitates, reproduces, is a replica of the attributes of God.¹⁵ Basil of Caesarea¹⁶ and

(1945), 64-70; G.Ladner, *op.cit.* 67; R.Heine, *Perfection in the virtuous life* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975), 50.

¹¹. Cf. H.Merki, [*ΟΜΟΙΩΣΙΣ ΘΕΟΥ: Von der Platonischen Angleichung an Gott zur Gottähnlichkeit bei Gregor von Nyssa* (Freiburg, 1952)] for other Christian and pre-Christian roots of this doctrine of the image. Cf. also H.Crouzel, *Théologie de l'Image de Dieu chez Origène* (Paris, 1955), 31-70, for a good exposition of this doctrine in Origen and R.Bernard, *L'Image de Dieu d'Après St.Athanase* (Paris, 1952) in Athanasius.

¹². Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man* (PG 44,136).

¹³. Cf.J.Plagnieux, *op.cit.* 445-448 for Nazianzen's doctrine of the image.

¹⁴. Cf.W.Völker, *Gregor von Nyssa als Mystiker* (Wiesbaden, 1955), 67: 'eikon und homoiosis als Synonyma verwandt werden'; H.v.Balthasar, *op.cit.* 152; R.Leys, (*L'image de Dieu chez Saint Grégoire de Nysse*, 116-119) claims that there is a certain distinction in Nyssa between the two terms. However, he admits that for Gregory there are not two different things, but two aspects of the same reality. Cf.J.Trinick, 'St.Gregory of Nyssa and the Doctrine of the Image', *The Eastern Churches Quarterly* 9 (1951), 181; A.Meredith, 'The concept of mind in Gregory of Nyssa and the Neoplatonists', *Studia Patristica XXII* (Leuven, 1989), 39-42. Meredith shows that there is an independent similarity between Gregory and Plotinus' Enneads.

¹⁵. J.Muckle, *op.cit.* 56; G.Ladner, 'The Philosophical Anthropology of Saint Gregory of Nyssa', 63-64; J.Daniélou, *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique*, 52; M.Aubineau, SC 119, 152-155. However, should we understand the likeness given already in the creation in a static way? A.Ellverson thinks that we should reckon even in Nyssa's case with some kind of progress of man, *op.cit.* 96, n.6. H.Merki, (*op.cit.* 173) and R.Leys (*L'image de Dieu chez Saint Grégoire de Nysse*, 116) also claim some distinction in emphasis between the two terms.

¹⁶Basil of Caesarea, *In Hexaemeron* 9,6 (PG 29,208AB). Cf.M.Orphanos, *op.cit.* 80f; A.Meredith, 'The concept of mind in Gregory of Nyssa and the Neoplatonists', 38-39, which shows the dependence of Basil on Origen; O.Papadopolou-Tsanana, *op.cit.* 31f. B.Kostits, [*The problem of salvation in the teaching of Basil the Great* (Athens, 1936), 15 and 18] is not right when he claims that there is not any distinction in Basil between 'image' and 'likeness'. Important is in this discussion M.Aghiorgoussis' work on Basil's concept of the 'image': M.Aghiorgoussis, *La*

Gregory Nazianzen¹⁷ and indeed most of the Greek Fathers in general conceived of likeness as the perfection of the original image relation; in creation this God-likeness existed only in germinal state.¹⁸

The fundamental anthropological question that the Cappadocians try to answer is : 'How can man, mortal, subject to passion, and short lived, be the image of the immortal, pure and eternal nature?'¹⁹ Furthermore, how can the human race be male and female, a distinction utterly foreign to the divine nature of which man is supposedly the image? Gregory of Nyssa tries to answer developing his theory of the double creation. This theory, which is in the heart of his anthropology²⁰ is an important concept towards the understanding of the role of virginity in his thought. Nyssa recognizes two stages in the formation of Adam. God first created universal man made to His own image. This universal man embraced present man's rational nature. It was made up of body and soul, but it was neither male nor female.

According to this theory, Genesis' verse 'God created man according to His image and likeness' does not speak of Adam. It speaks of humanity as a whole, the fullness of all men to come (ὅλον τό τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος πλήρωμα), who are already present to God's power, as if they formed one body.²¹ This notion of

dialectique de l'image de Dieu chez Saint Basile le Grand, Diss. (Louvain, 1964); idem, 'Image as sign of God. Knowledge of God through the Image according to St.Basil', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 21 (1976), 19-54; idem, 'Applications of the Theme 'Eikon Theou' (Image of God) according to St.Basil the Great', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 21 (1976), 265-288.

17. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.24,15* (SC 284,74); D.Tsamis, *The Dialectical Character of the Teaching of Gregory the Theologian*, 125-127. Note the different opinion of A.Ellverson, op.cit. 24.

18. Gregory of Nyssa is the first of the Fathers to attribute to man full ὁμοίωσις Θεῷ not only at the end, but at the beginning of his history, *On Virginity* 11,5 (GNO VIII,I, 300,8-12); See G.Ladner, 'The Philosophical Anthropology of Saint Gregory of Nyssa', 64 and in general R.Mc.Wilson, *The Early History of the Exegesis of Gen. 1.26*, *Studia Patristica* I (Berlin, 1957), 420f. On the distinction between 'image' and 'likeness' in Basil, see M.Aghiorgoussis, 'Applications of the Theme "Eikon Theou" ', 271-276.

19. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man*, 16 (PG 44,180B).

20. Most of the students of Nyssa agree that he supports such a theory. Cf.H.v.Balthasar, op.cit.; J.Daniélou, *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique*; W.Völker, *Gregor von Nyssa als Mystiker*; E.Moutsoulas, *The Incarnation of the Word and the Deification of Man in the teaching of Gregory of Nyssa* (Athens, 1965), 63-84; C.Boukiss, *The essence of religion according to the Cappadocian Fathers* (Thessalonica, 1967), 36-37; A.Meredith, 'The concept of mind in Gregory of Nyssa and the Neoplatonists', 47-49. However see a different approach in E.Corsini, 'Plérôme Humain et Plérôme Cosmique chez Grégoire de Nysse', *Écriture et Culture Philosophique dans la pensée de Grégoire de Nysse*, Actes du Colloque de Chevetogne, 22-26 Septembre 1969, (ed.) M.Harl (Leiden, 1971), 122-123; P.Chrestou, 'The human pleroma in the teaching of Gregory of Nyssa', *Kleronomia* 4, (1972), 41-62; N.Matsoukas, 'The double creation in the work of Gregory of Nyssa', 177-193; J.Cavarnos, *St.Gregory of Nyssa on the Origin and Destiny of Soul* (Belmont Mass. 1956), 2.

21. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man*, 16, (PG 44,185C): '...οὕτως οἶμαι καθάπερ ἐν ἐνὶ σώματι ὅλον τό τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος πλήρωμα τῇ προγενεστικῇ δυνάμει

pleroma of mankind can be found to some extent in Philo²², in Origen²³ and is usually considered a priori as a platonic element of Gregory's anthropology.²⁴ However, G.Ladner rightly makes the connection at this point with the Pauline doctrine of the Church as the Body of Christ, a *pleroma* of mankind²⁵ which Gregory describes extensively in his commentary on the Song of Songs.²⁶ The rest of the Genesis account of creation, 'male and female He created them' signifies the addition of sexual differentiation to the image of God.²⁷ We must note though, that this theory does not deny that man possessed a body in this ideal state, nor that the image of God is to be found in man even after the addition of sex.

This idea is very important since it justifies ontologically virginity. It is constructed around Genesis 1,26²⁸ and Genesis 1,27. 'How was it that after the making of His image God contrived for His creature the difference according to male and female?'²⁹ God created man as a composite being, not only spiritual, but also sexual,³⁰ because He foresaw his fall, Adam's and Eve's disobedience and the consequences which accompany fallen man's mortality.³¹ God knows that man, through the perverse use of his free will would lose his immortal life. So, He formed Adam bearing the same image, but his soul and body were equipped with appetites and powers to enable him to live as a rational being in a material body. Not only

παρά τοῦ Θεοῦ τῶν ὅλων περισχεθῆναι καί τοῦτο διδάσκειν τόν λόγον τόν εἰπόντα ὅτι καί ἐποίησεν ὁ Θεός τόν ἄνθρωπον καί κατ' εἰκόνα Θεοῦ ἐποίησεν αὐτόν ibid. 17 (PG 44,189C); ibid. 22 (PG 44,204D).

22. K.Vogt, 'Becoming Male: One aspect of early Christian Anthropology', *Concilium* 182 (6/1984), 73.

23. Origen, *In Jeremiam homily* II,1 (SC 232,238-240). Cf. H Crouzel, *Théologie de l'Image de Dieu chez Origène*, 148f.

24. A.Armstrong, 'Platonic Elements in St. Gregory of Nyssa's Doctrine of Man', 115. Cf. the opposite view of N.Matsoukas, op.cit. 178.

25. G.Ladner, 'The Philosophical Anthropology of Saint Gregory of Nyssa', 82.

26. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Song of Songs*, 8 (GNO VI, 244-261) and 13, (GNO VI, 370-399).

27. That the image is asexual, is derived from Col.1,15 in combination with Gal.3,28: the Image is Christ, and in Christ there is no male or female.

28. See P.Bratsiotis, 'Genesis 1:26 in Orthodox Theology', *Orthodoxia* (1952), 360-372, for a good account of the Patristic and the Cappadocian understanding of this verse.

29. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man*, 17 (PG 44,189B).

30. 'Thus the making of our nature is in a sense twofold: one made similar to the divine, the other divide according to that difference'(between the sexes): *On the Creation of Man*, 16 (PG 44,181B).

31. This notion influenced Maximus the Confessor, cf. *Ambiguorum Liber*, Ambigua 15 (PG 91,1104B). However Maximus gave heavy emphasis on the negative aspect of sex. Cf. J.Boojamra, 'Original Sin According to St. Maximus the Confessor', *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 20 (1976), 28-29; J.Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (New York, 1969), 332, n.28.

Adam, but every individual to the end of time possesses this image which was implanted in the pleroma of mankind.³²

In this exposition Gregory of Nyssa follows, but also modifies Philo,³³ who says: 'There is a big difference between the man as he is now and the one who was created in the image of God. The man in the image is spiritual (νοητός), incorporeal, neither male nor female.'³⁴ Gregory of Nyssa argues that within the human condition gender is something temporary since there is no gender in the eternal Godhead.³⁵ In the little treatise *On the Sixth Psalm* Gregory establishes a balance between the rites of female purification and male circumcision after childbirth and shows that together they symbolize the way Christ purges human nature of impurity and evil. The important point he makes though is that both male sexuality and female sexuality must be ultimately transcended.³⁶ However, Nyssa, unlike Philo, does not connect his theory with the Platonic androgyne and the Gnostic doctrines.

The two other Cappadocians do not support the theory about double creation.³⁷ However, they maintain that gender and sexuality³⁸ are unknown to the Godhead and consequently to the man created in the image of God.³⁹ Gregory Nazianzen too denies that there is gender in God. Their opponents charged the Cappadocians with bringing the divine down to a human, even a fleshly level by speaking of the Son's generation from the Father. In the *Fifth Theological Oration* Nazianzen counters this accusation, answering that of course he does not imagine

³². J.Muckle, op.cit. 63. A.Armstrong, 'Platonic Elements in St.Gregory of Nyssa's Doctrine of Man', 120-121, which overemphasizes Gregory's dependence on Plotinus' doctrine of matter and evil.

³³. For Philo's teaching of double creation, see G.Ladner, 'The Philosophical Anthropology of Saint Gregory of Nyssa', 80f.

³⁴. Philo, *De mundi opificio*, 134, Loeb vol.I, F.Golson-G.Whitaker (London, 1949), 106.

³⁵. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man*, 16 (PG 44,184D).

³⁶. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Sixth Psalm* (GNO V, 187-188). Cf.V.Harrison, 'Male and Female in Cappadocian Theology', 466.

³⁷. John Chrysostom does not speak of a second creation either before or after the fall, but his theory has common elements with Gregory of Nyssa's. He speaks of a 'refashioning'. After the fall God 'refashioned' the human body, which was originally superior to what it is now, so that it would be useful to us in our new situation': *On the Statues*, 11,4 (PG 49,125). In his description of the workings of the eye in the same homily, he writes that tears are a postlapsarian function [*On the Statues*, 11,3 (PG 49,122)], something of course with parallels in respect of other organs too.

³⁸. F.Fleori [Le sens de la division des sexes chez Grégoire de Nysse, *Revue des sciences religieuses* XXVII (1953), 108] claims that we should make the distinction between the divisions of sexes and the sexual instinct, the instinct of procreation (τήν πρὸς παιδοποιία ὁρμήν). However, the two are connected closely in the Cappadocian thought. Cf. R.Leys, *L'image de Dieu chez Saint Grégoire de Nysse*, 106-111 and H.v.Balthasar, op.cit. 52 n.5.

³⁹. Gregory Nazianzen, *In Laudem Virginitatis*, 410 (PG 37,553).

gender in God, a concept he considers outrageous and associates with pagan and Gnostic myths.⁴⁰

For Basil of Caesarea also the image of God defines humanity as such.⁴¹ It follows that everything extraneous to this image is secondary to the human condition and anything that obstructs or defaces it is a distortion of human nature that needs to be overcome.⁴² According to this, both gender and sexuality are secondary to the image and are going to be overcome.⁴³ Moreover, in the *Homily on Psalm 114*, Basil says that fleshly temptations will not exist because the gender distinction will no longer occur. 'For there is no male or female in the resurrection, but there is one certain life and it is of one kind, since those dwelling in the land of the living are well pleasing to their Master.'⁴⁴ Basil although accepts that procreation in marriage is a consolation (παράμυθία) for the death which is a result of the fall,⁴⁵ he does not follow Nyssa in asserting that God would have multiplied man in the same way He created the millions of angels, if the fall had not happened.⁴⁶

Nyssa writes: 'Because I have not kept my own vineyard' that is the natural state of her soul, the bride has lost by impurity this 'state free from passion (ἀπάθεια), likeness to God (ὁμοίωσις), and estrangement (ἀλλοτρίωσις) from evil.'⁴⁷ All three terms denote the image (εἰκὼν). In the Seventh Homily of Nyssa's *On the Song of Songs* we find again this reading: 'No one can adequately grasp the terms pertaining to God. For example, "mother" is mentioned in the Song in place of father. Both terms mean the same. There is neither male nor female in God (for how can anything transitory like this be attributed to God? But when we are one in Christ, we are divested of the signs of this difference along with the old man). Therefore, every name equally indicates God's ineffable nature; neither can "male" or "female" defile God's pure nature.'⁴⁸

⁴⁰. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.31,7* (SC 250,286-288).

⁴¹. For a further analysis of what the attributes of man which characterize the image of God within him, see M.Aghiorgoussis, 'Applications of the Theme "Eikon Theou" (Image of God) according to St.Basil the Great', 269.

⁴². Basil of Caesarea, *Homily on Psalm I* (PG 29,216D-217A).

⁴³. O.Papadopoulou-Tsanana's (op.cit. 49) different opinion that Basil accepts the difference of sexes from the beginning is not supported by Basil's texts.

⁴⁴. Basil of Caesarea, *Homily on Psalm 114* (PG 29,492C).

⁴⁵. Basil of Caesarea, *Letter 301* (R.Deferrari, iv, 224-230).

⁴⁶. O.Papadopoulou-Tsanana, op.cit.

⁴⁷. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Song of Songs*, 7 (GNO VI, 60,45).

⁴⁸. Ibid. (GNO VI, 212,14-213,9).

Thus, for the Cappadocians, a fundamental characteristic of the image of God is the absence of sexuality.⁴⁹ Nyssa comes back to this point many times in his works. The difference of sexes is added later to the image: 'ἐπιτεχνᾶται τῇ εἰκόνι τὴν περί τό ἄρρεν καί θῆλυ διαφοράν'.⁵⁰ Life in paradise was marked by virginity.⁵¹ In the background of this thought one can see Methodius of Olympus' views of the original human nature. Methodius, though has little to say of paradise itself, it is clear he considers man's soul to be pure, displaying most radiantly the image of its Maker, before it wears the fleshly covering.⁵² He describes the original state of the bodiless soul as virginity, an ontological kinship with the divine existence which gives it the ability to comprehend perfection. The obscuration of that bond of union took place through the interference of the soul with flesh, a process Methodius quite logically regards as a loss of virginity.⁵³ How virginity was lost is suggested by Methodius view of the tempter's motive: he is said to have been jealous of Adam's perfect virginity.

For the Cappadocians, the distinction between male and female 'is alien to our conceptions of God', and it 'has no reference to the divine archetype, but ... is an approximation to the less rational nature'.⁵⁴ Thus the being whose character is defined by likeness to God also shares the likeness of the beasts. For Gregory of Nyssa, this second likeness includes a whole complex of non-rational and biological characteristics - gender and the corresponding mode of reproduction, childhood and old age, nutrition and elimination, passions such as desire and aggressiveness, and

49. What does this absence of sexuality mean? J.Daniélou thinks that it does not mean that there was no distinction between male and female, since God himself gave Adam a companion in Paradise. Neither it implies the absence of fertility. Only the mode of propagation is different. Then it was angelic, now it is of animal: 'ἐπειδὴ προεῖδε τῇ ὁρατικῇ δυνάμει μὴ εὐθυποροῦσαν πρὸς τό καλόν τὴν προαίρεσιν ... ἀντί τῆς ἀγγελικῆς μεγαλοφυΐας τόν κτηνώδη τε καί ἄλογον τῆς ἐξ ἀλλήλων διαδοχῆς....' Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man*, 17 (PG 44,189C). Sexuality is not itself bad. It is only a decline. But it is the source of passions: 'οἶμαι γάρ ἐκ τῆς ἀρχῆς ταύτης (that is sexuality) καί τά καθέκαστον πάθη...' *On the Creation of Man*, 18 (PG 44,192A). Cf.J.Daniélou, *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique*, 53.

50. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man*, 16 (PG 44,185A).

51. Gregory Of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 12,4 (GNO VIII,I, 302,14-17) implies clearly that there was no sexual intercourse in paradise, since Adam did not 'know' her until there were banished, but what Gregory means 'using the helpmate given to him' (τῇ δοθείσῃ βοηθῶ πρὸς τοῦτο συγχρώμενος) toward the goal of 'eating sumptuously of the Lord' is a bit vague. Cf.M.Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 276.

52. Methodius of Olympus, *Symposium*, 6,1 (SC 95,164-166).

53. Ibid. 1,4 (SC 95,62-64).

54. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man* (PG 44,181A; 185A).

mortality itself. These characteristics are secondary and temporary features of the human condition, not parts of its essential and eternal and Godlike nature. Thus, Gregory's thought parallels that of the other two Cappadocians, but characteristically adds further systematic coherence. He links male and female to a larger complex of passions and biological functions including the instincts and emotions which human share with other animals. However, Nyssa's theory does not deny that woman is included in the image. This is in agreement with Basil who indicates clearly that woman is in the image of God.⁵⁵ While viewing woman as in an asexual sense in the image of God, Nyssa uses the last phrase of Gen. 1,27 to elaborate his theory about the double creation.⁵⁶

Generally the patristic exegesis of the story of Adam and Eve concentrated insistently on the virginal state of the first human couple.⁵⁷ The Cappadocians follow the same line: Adam and Eve remained physically virginal before their fall. Had their sin not happened, they would have continued so, fulfilling God's command to propagate by a kind of spiritual emanation in a matter similar to that of the angels.⁵⁸ This is an answer to the objection, that without sexual differentiation the human race would not have propagated and derives from Luke 20,35-36. In Gregory of Nyssa's thought the angelic life of our first parents and their perfect apatheia stands in a directly causal relationship with the fact of Adam's prelapsarian virginity: Adam's perfect apatheia is considered a property of the angelic life, but Adam possessed the angelic life, because he was virgin.⁵⁹ As we will be like the angels after the resurrection, we must have been leading an angelic life in Paradise, the resurrection being the restoration of the original state of man.⁶⁰ John Chrysostom later borrowed the argument: Despite their flesh and blood, Adam and Eve led a life resembling that of the angels before their fall from grace. In their state of angelic innocence they were able to live together as if they had no bodies. Had they not sinned, God would have

⁵⁵. Basil of Caesarea, *Homily X on the Hexaemeron* (SC 160, 212-216), although there is a dispute about the authenticity of this homily.

⁵⁶. M.Horowitz, 'The Image of God in Man - Is Woman Included?', *Harvard Theological Review* 72 (1979), 195-199.

⁵⁷. This happened in sharp contrast to rabbinic exegesis of Genesis, which may have been elaborated to counter Christian views. Cf.P.Brown, 'The Notion of Virginity in the Early Church', 430. Cf.Jerome, *Ep.22* (PL 22,394-425); Tertullian, *Virginibus velandis*, 5,1 (PL 2,943-944); Origen, *Commentary in Romans*, 5,9 (PG 14,1043-1048); Basil of Ancara, *On the True Purity of Virgins*, 54 (PG 30,776-777).

⁵⁸. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man*, chapters 16-17.

⁵⁹. Ibid. 5,17 (PG 44,137,188-189).

⁶⁰. Cf.F.Fleori, *op.cit.* 105f.

multiplied the species of man in the same way in which he created him and the millions of angels that inhabit the heavens.⁶¹

What Gregory of Nyssa means by angelic propagation, however, is perhaps not as straightforward as it may seem at first glance, and there are indications in the text that he may not be stating explicitly his full opinion concerning the reproductive activity God intended for the human race.⁶² God gives us a 'dual organization' 'mixing the divine with the earthly, so that the human being might have the enjoyment of God through the more divine nature and the enjoyment of the good things of the earth through the senses akin to them'.⁶³ The erotic need of the sexes for each other always represents on some level for the Cappadocians an alienation from the state of satisfaction experienced in paradise, and sexual ἔρως is treated as a symptom of alienation. However, the Cappadocians distinguish 'pleasure' from 'enjoyment' with respect to the senses.⁶⁴ Their position, therefore, does not agree with that given by Origen⁶⁵ that the Holy Spirit does not preside over conjugal relations and the opinion of Jerome⁶⁶ that one cannot pray while fulfilling one's conjugal duty. It agrees instead with that of Clement of Alexandria, for whom the true Gnostic is 'holy' in drinking, eating, and marrying, and 'is always purified to prayer'.⁶⁷

⁶¹. John Chrysostom, *On Virginity*, 14,5; 14,6; 15,2 (SC 125,140,52-146,30). Cf. N. Adkin, 'The Date of John Chrysostom's De Virginitate', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 60, fasc.II (Roma, 1994), 616 n.18.

⁶². Cf. the previous chapter, 'The Virginity of the Angels'.

⁶³. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man*, 2,2 (PG 44,133A).

⁶⁴. M. Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 279.

⁶⁵. Origen, *Homily in Numbers*, 6,3 (SC 29,130). For a full exposition of Origen's theology of virginity see H. Crouzel, *Virginité et Mariage selon Origène*, op.cit.

⁶⁶. Jerome, *Epist.* 22,22 (PL 22,409). For Jerome's idea of virginity see D. Dumm, op.cit.

⁶⁷. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, 7,12 (BENET 8,282).

B.

FALL - LOSS OF VIRGINITY AND INTRODUCTION OF MARRIAGE

According to Cappadocian theology, as an image of God, man had the ability to turn his opinion and will to what he liked, not restricted by any external factors. But after the suggestion from the devil, he found willingly the evil.¹ Since then the evil is the master of the human race. Man, although living in a place of goodness, used his freedom and introduced what is against the human nature (τά παρὰ φύσιν).² Evil does not exist by itself outside the will of man, because everything was created by God very well.³ By the disobedience of the first man sin was introduced. It took terrible dimensions and the beauty of the soul was darkened: 'ἀπώλεσε μὲν τό εἰκὼν εἶναι τοῦ ἀφθάρτου Θεοῦ, τήν δέ φθαρτήν καί πῆλινην εἰκόνα διὰ τῆς ἀμαρτίας μετημφιάσατο.'⁴

The loss of the 'κατ' εἰκόνα' does not mean the destruction of the spiritual powers of man, but the loss of the incorruptibility and of the spiritual beauty.⁵ The first man is not any more exact image of the incorruptible God. The likeness to God

¹. Basil of Caesarea, *Quod Deus non est Auctor Malorum* 6, (PG 31,344BC).

². For the concept of the original sin in the Cappadocians generally see H.Rondet, *Original Sin. The Patristic and Theological Background* (Shannon, 1972), 91-100. Cf. also for Nyssa, E.McClear, 'The Fall of Man and the Original Sin in the theology of Gregory of Nyssa', *Theological Studies* 9 (1948), 175-212 and for Gregory Nazianzen, J.Szymusiak, 'Grégoire de Nazianze et le péché', 288-305.

³. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 12,2 (GNO VIII,I, 297,24-300,12); *On the Song of Songs*, 2 (GNO VI, 50-52).

⁴. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 12,2 (GNO VIII,I, 299,29-300,2); Basil of Caesarea, *Quod Deus non est Auctor Malorum* 7 (PG 31,345A). Cf.M.Aghiorgoussis, 'Image as sign of God', 45-46.

⁵. C.Scouteris, *Consequences of the Fall and the Laver of Regeneration*, 51f; D.Tsamis, *The Dialectical Character of the Teaching of Gregory the Theologian*, 128-135.

is not an achievement of man; it was from the beginning a gift from God. This is particularly stressed by Gregory of Nyssa.⁶ The moment in which Adam assumed the passible and passionate, corporeal-sexual condition, which man has had ever since, was when God gave Adam and Eve garments made from the skins of animals⁷. These are the famous, δερμάτινοι χιτῶνες, which have a long history in late classical and early Christian thought.⁸ The Cappadocians identify these skins with man's actual assumption of the corporeal mode of existence,⁹ which God had at first created only potentially, when according to Genesis 1,27, He made man male and female. Gregory of Nyssa's whole anthropology is directed toward the overcoming of corporeality as it exists in man after the fall. The crucial scriptural texts concerning the creation of man's body are Genesis 1,27 which refers to the origin of sexuality and Genesis 3,21 that refers to mortality through the metaphor of the skins of dead animals.

Nyssa stresses the fact that the garments of skin, as the Genesis narrative clearly shows, were put on man after the fall and do not form one of his natural constituent elements.¹⁰ According to this teaching what today is called 'human nature' is a later nature, a state which came about after the fall, and not the original, and therefore true, human nature: 'For the life which has been made similar to the divine nature is that which is proper to men and in accordance with nature.'¹¹ The garments of skin clearly are not identified with the human body. Origen, influenced by his concept of the pre-existence of souls, was in some doubt about this,¹² but the

⁶. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 12,2 (GNO VIII,I, 298); *On the Song of Songs 15*, (GNO VI, 458,3-12).

⁷. *Genesis*, 3,21: 'And the Lord God made for Adam and his wife garments of skins and clothed them.'

⁸. See, A.Armstrong, 'Platonic Elements in St.Gregory of Nyssa's Doctrine of Man', 123; J.McGarry, 'St. Gregory of Nyssa and Adam's Body', *Thought* 10 (1935-36), 81-94; J.Daniélou, 'Les tuniques de peau chez Grégoire de Nysse', *Glaube, Geist, Geschichte. Festschrift für Ernst Benz* (Leiden, 1967), 355-367; idem. *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique*, 48-60; P.Nellas, *Deification in Christ, The Nature of the Human Person* (New York, 1987), 43-91; M.Aubineau, SC 119, 159-160; G.Ladner, 'The Philosophical Anthropology of Saint Gregory of Nyssa', 88-89; E.Moutsoulas, op.cit. 87-96; C.Scouteris, *Consequences of the Fall and the Laver of Regeneration*, 61-68.

⁹. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection* (PG 46,148C).

¹⁰. Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration*, 8 (PG 45,33C); *On the Lords Prayer*, 5 (GNO VII,II, 65,2-15). Cf.J.Daniélou, *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique*, 58-59.

¹¹. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Ecclesiastes*, 1 (GNO V, 284,19-20).

¹². Origen, *On Genesis*, 3,2 (PG 12,101A).

Cappadocians disagree.¹³ Instead, they tried to stress the central Christian truth that the body and the soul together constitute the 'natural' man.¹⁴

The concept of 'garments of skin' express the mortality which man put on as his second nature after the fall. It was also used as a metaphor for the passions.¹⁵ For Gregory of Nyssa, whereas before the fall man was 'naked of the covering of dead skins'¹⁶, afterwards 'he was clothed with dead skins'.¹⁷ 'Therefore mortality, derived from the nature of beings lacking intelligence, was by God's dispensation imposed on a nature created for immortality.'¹⁸ The same idea is expressed by Gregory of Nazianzus.¹⁹ Creation fell out of its original meaning and direction. God had entrusted control over the world to man -His own 'image and likeness'. But man chose to be controlled by the world and, thereby, lost his freedom. He became subject to cosmic determinism, to which his passions attach him and in which ultimate power belongs to death. The change in man's situation is described by the Cappadocians in terms of a new dependence upon the animal side of the world's existence. Instead of using the potentialities of his nature to raise himself and the whole of creation to God, man submitted himself to the desires of his material senses. As a result, the world which was originally created by God as 'very good' became for man a prison and a constant temptation, through which the 'prince of this world' establishes his reign.

Man no longer has life in the way that he did previously, as a characteristic proper to his being. Life continues only so long as death is postponed. That which exists now in the proper sense is death: life has been transmuted into survival.²⁰ Mortality, the absence of life, or the 'chilled life',²¹ is the primary significance of the garments of skin. That man clothed himself with mortality coincides with the fact that he clothed himself with irrational nature. Henceforth he lives the life of such a nature

13. They were strongly critical of this idea to counter gnosticism which depreciated the human body, Cf.C.Scouteris, *Consequences of the Fall and the Laver of Regeneration*, 62.

14. Cf.Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.45* (PG 36,632); Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man*, 29 (PG 44,233D).

15. For a fuller discussion of the dead skins as a metaphor for the passions, see J.Daniélou, *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique*, 48-61.

16. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 12,4, (GNO VIII,I, 302,9-10).

17. Ibid. 12,20-21, (GNO VIII,I, 302,24-25).

18. Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration 8*, (PG 45,33CD).

19. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.38,12* (SC 358,128-130).

20. P.Nellas, op.cit. 47. Cf.Basil of Caesarea, *Long Rules, quest. 2,3* (PG 31,913B).

21. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection* (PG 46,148C-149A).

and is characterized by its attributes. Nyssa speaks of 'that dead and ugly garment in which we are clothed, formed from the skins of unintelligent beings'. He goes on to explain, 'When I hear the word skin it conveys to me the form of irrational nature, with which having become familiar with passion, we have been clothed. It is those things which man took in addition from irrational skin: sexual union, conception, birth, pollution, the nipple, food, excretion, gradual growth to full stature, adult life, old age, sickness, death,'²² that is, what we call today biological life.

However, in his thought 'sexual union', 'birth', and the other stages of man's development are not restricted to bodily activities. They also imply functions of the soul, which likewise dress themselves in the 'irrational form', losing their freedom and degenerating into instincts. The whole psychosomatic human organism has been constricted within the boundaries of the 'irrational form'. The body has certainly dressed itself in garments of skin. It has become 'coarse and solid';²³ it is characterized by 'this gross and heavy composition'²⁴, although at the resurrection, when it will recover its prelapsarian nature in a perfected form, it will be 'respun' 'into something lighter and more aerial'; it will be re-established 'in a better and more attractive beauty'.²⁵

The functions of the soul, have also become 'corporeal' along with those of the body. According to Nyssa they form together with the body 'the veil of the heart (τῆς καρδίας τό κάλυμμα) ... the fleshy covering of the old man (τὴν ῥακώδη τοῦ παλαιοῦ ἀνθρώπου περιβολήν)'.²⁶ In a clear formulation of Nyssa, the garments of skin are the 'will of the flesh' (φρόνημα τῆς σαρκός).²⁷ The heart of the matter is a general association of man with materiality, with the constant movement and change which make him impassioned and in his totality 'carnal'.

Sexuality and reproduction are intimately connected with man's fall. Man's salvation could be brought about only by a reversal of the circumstances of the fall, that is by an absence of sexuality, and specifically by virginity. The question of

²². Ibid.

²³. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Those who have Fallen Asleep* (PG 46,532C).

²⁴. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection* (PG 44,108A).

²⁵. Ibid.

²⁶. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Song of Songs*, 11 (GNO VI, 328,6-9).

²⁷. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 13 (GNO VIII,I, 303,15-16).

whether there had been sexual relations before the fall is similar with the question of whether men and women would be sexual beings in Paradise.²⁸ The Cappadocians agree that the bodily condition as such, as it existed in Adam and Eve in Paradise before the Fall, was not affected by passions. It was a corporeality very much like the spiritual one which will again prevail after the resurrection.²⁹ Nyssa speaks of *χιτῶνες φωτοειδεῖς*, garments that man wore before he had to put on the garments of skin, which will regain through Christ.³⁰ This 'divinely woven' attire was his psychosomatic dress which had been woven with grace, with the light and glory of God. This refers to the attire of the 'image', the prelapsarian human nature formed by the breath of God and endowed with a deiform structure.³¹ This attire shone with 'the likeness of the divine' which was constituted, not by a 'shape' or a 'colour', but by 'apatheia', 'blessedness' and 'incorruption', the characteristics by which 'the divine is contemplated as beauty'.³² These garments correspond to the paradisiac condition of man.³³ A Christian receives them back in baptism and he can wear them on earth in his ascetic ascent to God. They will be the reward of the saints in the resurrection of their bodies.³⁴

For Gregory of Nyssa the human body was originally spirit-like as it will again be in the end.³⁵ When the body of the creation was 'asexual', the body of the resurrection will be neither male, nor female. In Paradise, sexuality was not yet operative.³⁶ The creation of the sexes according to Genesis 1,27 involved only the possibility, not the necessity of sexual propagation. For, in Paradise before the fall,

28. Jerome was also in no doubt -marriage arose for Adam and Eve only after the Fall, when it was intended to 'replenish the earth', while virginity replenished Paradise: *Adversus Jovinianum*, I.16,35 (PL 23,246BC).

29. G.Ladner, 'The Philosophical Anthropology of Saint Gregory of Nyssa', 89.

30. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Song of Songs*, 11 (GNO VI, 328,20); *On the Lord's Prayer*, 5 (GNO VII,II, 65,5-6).

31. Cf.P.Nellas, op.cit. 52.

32. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Those who have Fallen Asleep* (PG 46,521D).

33. It is interesting to compare this concept of the 'divinely woven' with Gregory Nazianzen's thought, when he says that the first man was naked (!) by virtue of his simplicity. As Maximus the Confessor explains this means that his body did not contain within it the mutually contradictory 'qualities' which now pull it in different directions, scourge it with corruption and make it decay [Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* (PG 91,1353AB)]. The body of Adam was so simple that it was in reality transparent.

34. Cf.J.Daniélou, *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique*, 57f.

35. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection* (PG 44,108A).

36. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man*, 17 (PG 44,188A): 'ἀποικισθέντων δέ τοῦ παραδείσου μετα τὴν ἁμαρτίαν καὶ τῆς γυναικος τῇ τιμωρίᾳ τῶν ὠδίνων κατακριθείσης οὕτως ἐλθεῖν τὸν Ἀδὰμ εἰς τὸ γινῶναι γαμικῶς τὴν ὁμόζυγον καὶ τότε τῆς παιδοποιίας τὴν ἀρχὴν γενεσθαι.'

man was similar to the angels. Man's mode of propagation, too, could have been an angelic one.³⁷ God, foreseeing which way man's free will would go, and that he would fall out of the life of the angels, provided nature with the difference of male and female, and so with the capacity of propagation that is suitable for those who have fallen. Only after the fall of Adam and Eve and after their being clothed in the garments of skin does Gregory of Nyssa use such terms as marriage (γάμος) and sexual union (μῖξις); regarding the time before the fall he speaks only of the distinction of male and female.³⁸

Thus, for the Cappadocians, only if man received mutability, which is linked to his bodily constitution and the gift of sexual propagation, would mankind as a whole, be able to reach its pre-ordained pleroma, only thus would it have the opportunity to return to God. Without the mutable and mortal body man would have remained fixed in spiritual distance from God, together with the fallen angels; without sexual propagation mortal fallen man would have become extinct on Adam and Eve. Through God's foresight humanity obtained the opportunity of reform in its individuals. At the end of time, in heaven, where there is no marriage, the first creational image-likeness with God, with Christ, in whom there is neither male or female,³⁹ will come to the fore again.

Some scholars, based on Gregory of Nyssa's 'it was by the entrance of evil that the race was multiplied'⁴⁰ attribute to him the idea that the multiplicity of mankind is itself an evil and it would have been better if the archetypal man had continued to subsist in his pure intellectual unity and uniqueness.⁴¹ Such an idea has no basis in Nyssa's thought. Had man not sinned and had he therefore remained in Paradise, mankind would have been multiplied, but in some angelic way unknown to us. What would have happened in Paradise, would have been good, and therefore Gregory of Nyssa has nothing to say against the multiplicity of mankind. As a fact, the multiplication of the race did not begin until after the sin of our first parents, and then it took place in the way of sexual propagation. Hence Gregory says that the actual propagation of the human kind did as a fact follow the entrance of sin. As God

³⁷. Ibid. (PG 44,188D).

³⁸. F.Floeri, op.cit. 108.

³⁹. *Galatians* 3,28; Cf.Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man*, 16 (PG 44,181A) and (PG 44,181D).

⁴⁰. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection* (PG 46,157).

⁴¹. E.Suttcliffe, 'Saint Gregory of Nyssa and Paradise', *The Ecclesiastical Review* LXXXIV (1931), 348.

intended man to live in Paradise, and consequently, on Gregory's view, to be multiplied in a non sexual way, it follows that in the original divine conception of man's nature, there was no place for the distinction of sex. It was only after the Fall that God in His wisdom providing for the permanence of the human race allowed the loss of virginity, and that the human race should be multiplied by intercourse.⁴² From the beginning virginity had priority over marriage. This is another application of the principle that the end will be like the beginning⁴³: to the eschatological superiority of virginity corresponds its protological priority; if the eschatological life will be angelic, the same must be true for the life of paradise.⁴⁴

Basil of Ancara is also of special interest in this discussion. In his work *On the True Purity of Virgins* he confirms that marriage did not exist in paradise: 'But if you look at Adam and his life in paradise not just superficially, you would find that in paradise he had no need to know his wife, but that he knew her only after the transgression, and the entrance of death, and the expulsion from Paradise in order to comfort his nature which was hence forth mortal, by the succession of children'.⁴⁵ The linking of death and marriage is not original: we found it already in Luke 20,36⁴⁶ and in Origen.⁴⁷ Basil of Ancara's originality is that the absence of death and marriage is neither projected into the future world, nor conceived as yet being realized in the virgin's life. In Basil of Ancara it is projected into the past, even into the *arche*, the beginning. The relation between death and marriage here receives an etiological, or protological explanation. The world to come where there will be neither death nor marriage, is the restoration of paradise, where these realities were also absent.⁴⁸

⁴². Gregory Nazianzen, *In Laudem Virginitatis*, 117-127 (PG 37,531-532).

⁴³. This idea was widely accepted in the patristic age: Origen, *De Principiis*, 1,6,2 (SC 252,196-200); Tatian, *Or.20,3-4* (BEIIEΣ 4,255-256).

⁴⁴. Cf.E.Gilson, op.cit. 58.

⁴⁵. Basil of Ancara, *On the True Purity of Virgins*, 54 (PG 30,777C); Cf.Gregory Nazianzen, *Exhortatio ad virgines*, 410 (PG 37,553).

⁴⁶. The text suggests a certain relation between marriage and death: marriage ceases to exist when people have obtained the resurrection and have become immortal. It is not a protological explanation of marriage, it does not connect death with the expulsion from Paradise. It nevertheless suggests that death is the cause of marriage. It refers to the eschatological situation after the resurrection, but the conclusion easily can be drawn, that by abstaining from marriage man could anticipate the future eschatological situation and overcome death. Cf.T.van Eijk, op.cit. 215.

⁴⁷. Origen, *Homily in Luke*, 39,2 (SC 87,450-452). Origen's comment applies equally well to the ἔσχατα and the πρῶτα. As marriage and the begetting of children will cease to exist once death has been vanquished, so there could be no question of marriage before death came to power.

⁴⁸. T.van Eijk, op.cit. 224.

For the Cappadocians, it is clear that the Fall of Adam and Eve had not consisted in their joining together in the wrong manner, that is in sexual intercourse.⁴⁹ The result of man's fall is not the multiplication of the human race, but the mode of generation, a carnal generation which entails man's subjection to an animal mode of existence. Clement of Alexandria argues⁵⁰ that the fall of Adam and Eve did not consist in marriage as such, but in the fact that they united before the moment determined by God, so the actual sin was disobedience. But even for Clement, the tree of knowledge means marriage (γνῶσις–ἔγνων, Genesis 4,1). Why is the order not to touch it considered temporary. Is this because of the complete silence of the text on any intercourse of the protoplasts in paradise? The Cappadocians do not follow the radical view that the fall itself is due to the manner in which Adam and Eve had abandoned their angelic status by imitating beasts in having intercourse. Nonetheless, they insisted that the present human need for the consolations of marriage, for intercourse, and for the joy of children sprang directly from the chill dread of death and sense of physical transience that had followed fast upon fall. For the Cappadocians, we do not know the form of union in paradise before the fall, since we do not know precisely what the human body was like before the fall. The body existed, and male and female existed separately, each with his or her special psychosomatic make up. However, the first human beings were not subject to bodily needs; although they have bodies they have need of nothing bodily. They lived in paradise like angels.⁵¹

This Cappadocian interpretation should not be narrowly conceived. The mark of the heavenly world is separation from the unruly life of the passions. The great mystery shown by the manner of the incarnation is that 'purity is the only adequate sign of the presence and the coming of God, which cannot otherwise be truly attained, unless one separates oneself completely from the passions of the flesh'.⁵² This defines the essence of virginity and it goes deeper than any merely physical considerations. The varying impulses of desire and anger must fall away from the disciple of Christ. Living and moving and having His being in him, he must not bear in himself that opposition of states which is implied in the male and female of which

⁴⁹. E.McClear, op.cit. 184.

⁵⁰. Against the Encratites, for whom the union with God and the fleshly union of man and woman were incompatible.

⁵¹. John Chrysostom also maintains that marriage was introduced after the fall, cf. T.Zeses, *Man and World in the Economy of God according to Chrysostom* (Thessalonica, 1971), 136f.

⁵². Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 2,2 (GNO VIII,I, 20-24).

Paul speaks. It is necessary to leave behind the condition of mutability in which the mind may still be deflected from the true and ultimate good.

The Cappadocians confine themselves to stating that 'the forms of corruption' -pleasurable attraction, sexual union and biological birth- did not exist before the fall. Since their intention is not to provide an answer to a purely speculative question, they refuse to give positive support to any specific view about the prelapsarian state. They maintain however, that God instituted marriage as a bridle of the material. Marriage is a divine institution serving man's condition after the Fall. In place of those who died, others come to life through marriage. Thus, marriage and the procreation of children are a consolation for the mortality of human race. The Cappadocians acknowledge and develop more this tradition that marriage was invented (ἐπενεώθη) outside Paradise, as a consolation to death (παράμυθία τοῦ ἀποθνήσκειν).⁵³ In the journey from the incorruptibility to the corruptibility the final stop is marriage. An opposite journey back to paradise requires the abandonment of marriage, then of this painful and corruptible life and of the garments of skin, that is, of the *phronema* of the flesh.

All these do not mean that the Cappadocians consider marriage as a consequence of sin.⁵⁴ It is true that in the present situation of man marriage is something ambiguous: that is why virginity remains preferable. But marriage is not to be repudiated for its origin. It is a salutary mean that God provides in order that the predetermined number of human souls may be completed.⁵⁵ God now grants to the human race a different way to reach its fullness.⁵⁶ This is a well-considered rejection of the view of the Encratites.⁵⁷ Marriage is not a despicable institution, it serves a

⁵³. Ibid. 12,4 (GNO VIII,I, 302,27). Cf.M.Aubineau, SC 119, 160-161. See chapter 4: Marriage and Virginity, part A: Abolition of Death - The Eschatological Vision of Virginity, for a fuller examination of this idea.

⁵⁴. Cf.S.deBoer, op.cit. 109-110; T.van Eijk, op.cit. 231.

⁵⁵. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man*, 22 (PG 44,250BC). As Plato and Origen, Gregory of Nyssa thinks that the complete number of human souls has been determined beforehand: 'As the complete number of human beings that was due to enter this life by the way of birth that is common to animals was observed beforehand by prescient activity, and after our nature's inclination towards the lowly, which He, who sees equally present and future, saw before it took place- had made such way of birth necessary for mankind,- God ... also observed beforehand the time as commensurate with the fabrication of man; so the duration of time has been made to correspond with the arrival of the predetermined souls, and the transitory motion of time comes then to a standstill, when the human race is not any longer increasing throughout time.'

⁵⁶. Ibid. (PG 44,205A).

⁵⁷. However, in other cases (*On Virginity*, chapter 14) Gregory moves very closely to the radical eschatology of the Encratites and the corresponding rejection of marriage. Cf T.van Eijk, op.cit. 232.

positive purpose, the completion of mankind. The moment of resurrection is not to be brought about by a 'collective suicide': It coincides with the end of marriage, and the completion of number of souls, and as this is only known by God, there is no reason why man should stop the course of time.

To recapitulate, the Cappadocians and Gregory of Nyssa especially give the most thorough interpretation of the long-standing tradition, that there was no room for marriage in Paradise. God according to Genesis 1,27 gave man a mortal and asexual body because he foresaw how he would act and because He knew that under these circumstances mortality and sexuality will function as remedy. Only when Adam and Eve actually committed sin did the inferiority of man's bodily constitution make its appearance, symbolized by the garments of skin of Genesis 3,21. In Paradise, before the fall, the body was in full union with the highest part of the soul, and after its resurrection, it will again be in harmony with the spirit. On earth the ascetic way of life and virginity mystically anticipate man's return to paradise and tend toward spiritualization of the body and thus toward re-assimilation to God. This role of virginity in the salvation of humankind in the teaching of the Cappadocian Fathers will be examined in the next chapter, the soteriology of virginity.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SOTERIOLOGY OF VIRGINITY

A .

THE RETURN TO PARADISE

When the Cappadocians presented their Anthropology, the doctrine of the creation of man in the image and likeness of God and of man's fall, they were already pointing towards their Soteriology¹, the presentation of the doctrine of incarnation. Indeed, in their theological system the teaching on incarnation occupied a special dialectical position in relation to all that had preceded. But, they also see the entire divine economy, the whole chain of salvation (σωτηρία) in the light of virginity and create, so to say, a soteriology of virginity. This chain of salvation reaches from the three persons in the Trinity and the angelic powers of heaven to mankind as its last link.

In the first Adam 'death established its reign' being 'transmitted until the end in a sequence of succession';² thus all died in Adam, as Paul had said.³ The economy of salvation in Christ, the second Adam had to overcome death. A person who was

¹. The literature about the Cappadocian teaching on salvation is immense: P.Chrestou, 'The Meaning of Salvation in the Cappadocian Fathers', *Kleronomia* 5 (1973), 347-374. See especially, For Nyssa: J.Aufhauser, *Die Heilslehre des hl. Gregor von Nyssa* (Munchen 1910); D.Balas, op.cit.; J.Bouchet, 'La vision de l'économie du salut selon Saint Grégoire de Nysse', *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 52 (1968), 613-644; D.Blank, 'The Etymology of Salvation in Gregory of Nyssa's De Virginitate', *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s.37 (1980), 79-90; E.Moutsoulas, *The Incarnation of the Word and the Deification of Man in the teaching of Gregory of Nyssa*; P.Nellas, *Deification in Christ*; R.Kees, *Die Lehre von der Oikonomia Gottes in der Oratio catechetica Gregors von Nyssa* (Leiden, 1994). For Nazianzen: F.Norris, *Gregory of Nazianzus' Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, Diss. (Yale University, 1970); D.Winslow, op.cit.; L.Stephan, *Die Soteriologie des hl. Gregor von Nazianz* (Vienna, 1938); V.Harrison, 'Some Aspects of Saint Gregory the Theologian's Soteriology', *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 34 (1989); T.Spidlik, *Grégoire de Nazianze*; H.Althaus, op.cit. For Basil: B.Kostits, op.cit.; M.Orphanos, op.cit.; J.Karmiris, The teaching of Basil the Great on salvation, *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ ΝΕ* (1984), 873-919.

². Basil of Caesarea, *On the Spirit*, 14,31 (SC 17,164).

³. 1Cor. 15,22.

originally created in the image of God now had to undergo baptism, in order to 'scrape off the evil matter and receive again the image whole.'⁴ So disfigured had human nature become and so appalling was its misery that the Cappadocians found it necessary to speak about nothing less than 'the defacing of that image and the destruction of that divine impress which had been formed in us when we were first created': ὁ τε τῆς εἰκόνης ἀφανισμός καί ἡ λύπη τοῦ θείου χαρακτῆρος τοῦ παρὰ τὴν πρώτην κτίσιν ἐν ἡμῖν μορφωθέντος.⁵ The transcendence of the divine nature was so elevated that it defied expression in human words; but 'the greatness of that loss in falling away from the possession of real goodness'⁶ was a tragedy that was also inexpressible, in this case not because it was so glorious, but because it was so abject. Human nature, though destined for the heights of participation in the divine nature through theosis, had instead failed to achieve this participation.⁷ There was, therefore, a demonic image corresponding to the divine image: 'As there are obvious characteristics of resemblance to God through which one may become a child of God,' Gregory of Nyssa explained, 'so also there are certain signs belonging to the evil character, the bearer of which cannot be the child of God, because of being stamped with the image of the contrary nature.' The features of this evil character were 'envy and hate, slander, conceit, cupidity, passionate lust, and man's ambition.'⁸

The fall trampled upon the image of God profoundly, but did not destroy it. What was deeply wounded is the resemblance, the possibility of likeness. For the Cappadocians only the miracle of the Atonement could place man once more in his truth. The role of our original destiny has now become clear. The integrity of human nature is restored through Christ, because He represents as figure (Archetype) that which we are.⁹ The Cappadocians stress the restoration of the original image.¹⁰ The metamorphosis of the first creation into the second is described by Gregory Nazianzen: 'I had a share in the image, but I did not keep it. Christ shares in my flesh that he may both save the image and make the flesh immortal. He communicates a second fellowship far more marvelous than the first had been. For then he imparted

4. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.40,34* (SC 358,274-275).

5. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Lord's Prayer*, 5 (GNO VII,II, 63,10-12).

6. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity* (GNO VIII,I, 288).

7. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, 2 (GNO VII,I, 126).

8. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Lord's Prayer*, 2 (GNO VII,II, 29,7-18).

9. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.37,2* (SC 318,314).

10. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, 3,2,54 (GNO II, 70,7-15). Cf.M.Canévet, 'Grégoire de Nysse', *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique* 6, 992f; M.Aubineau, SC 119, 165-171.

the better nature, whereas this time he himself participates in the worse nature. This is more Godlike than the former action.'¹¹

This process spoken of by the two Gregorys could be described by Basil of Caesarea, as 'coming back to natural beauty' and as 'restoring the ancient form of the royal image.'¹² The metamorphosis of human nature through the restoration of the image of God had to be a divine gift, coming from none other than the Creator who had originally conferred the original image.¹³ This restoration of the image had not simply gone back to the original, but had, in the words of Gregory Nazianzen quoted earlier, 'communicated a second fellowship vastly more marvelous than the first had been', the fellowship of theosis.¹⁴

For the Cappadocians, God's presence can never be grasped intellectually. Because our sense faculties grasp physical reality immediately, since there is no mediator between what is grasped and the person grasping it, they provide excellent imagery for the soul's apprehension of spiritual reality. Prior to this apprehension, however, the soul must undergo a purification (κάθαρσις) of God's image. Gregory of Nyssa connects this purification to the restoration of the soul in its original paradisiac existence. Once sensible joys have been purified, man is free to taste God's goodness in paradise. Death of corporeal senses does not signify death of all pleasure.¹⁵ When Nyssa explains in his *On the Song of Songs* the watchful sleep of the bride, he shows that sleep of bodily senses is a condition for another kind of enjoyment or ἡδονή:

'There is a two-fold nature of pleasure in man: one is effected in the soul by freedom from passion, and another by passion in the body; of these two, the one which free will chooses has power over the other. If a pleasure pays attention to his senses and is drawn by pleasure in the body, he will live his life without tasting divine joy, since the good can be overshadowed by what is inferior. For those who desire God, a good not shadowed over by anything awaits them; they realize that what enters the senses must be avoided. Therefore, when the soul enjoys only contemplation of Being, it will arise for those things which effect sensual pleasure. It puts to rest all bodily movement, and by naked, pure insight, the soul will see God in a divine watchfulness.'¹⁶

¹¹. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.38,13* (SC 358,134,35-41).

¹². Basil of Caesarea, *On the Spirit*, 9,23 (SC 17,147).

¹³. Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, chapter 12.

¹⁴ Cf. M. Aghiorgeoussis, 'Image as Sign of God', 46-49 for a similar account in Basil of Caesarea.

¹⁵. J. Daniélou, *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique*, 235.

¹⁶. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Song of Songs*, 10 (GNO VI, 313,7-314,7).

An important part of this discussion of the Cappadocian Soteriology is their teaching on the role of virginity in attaining salvation. For the Cappadocians the pre-eminent meaning of virginity lies in aspiring to one's true nature. The struggle is not against the flesh, but against its distortions and their source. The virgin condition of dispassionate passion anticipates the age to come. Virginity is for the Cappadocians as Gregory of Nyssa expresses it, in the introduction of his *On Virginity*,¹⁷ a 'door of entrance to a holier life'.¹⁸ Moreover, it is the channel which draws down the Deity to share man's estate and a bond of union between the divine and the human.¹⁹ It is presented as the central virtue through which man perfects himself and reaches his goal, which is participation in the purity and incorruptibility of God. It is the mediating force which brings God down to man and lifts man to God. It corrects the catastrophe of man's fall and restores him to the contemplation of the divine nature.²⁰

For the Cappadocians the goal of virginity is the vision of God. In their theology they are trying to find the suitable way for reaching this vision. They try to catch sight of the original wholeness of human nature which has been obscured in our present situation. Nyssa provides an outline of this original wholeness by explaining what Genesis 1,27 implies by 'image of God'. Human beings are 'rational and intelligent animals' and as such were intended to be 'an imitation of the divine and undefiled nature', reflecting its beauty in themselves. 'The passionate and mortal disposition' (τό παθητικόν τε καί ἐπίκτητον)²¹ which we see now in human beings did not belong to human nature in its first form. As the image of God the first human had from the beginning 'the autonomous authority (αὐτεξουσίω) of choice.'²²

The choices of the first man reflected the wholeness and beauty of creation because he himself was still whole and his choice would naturally be in keeping with that harmony. Human beings are themselves the 'inventor of the vices'. In other words, human invent evil by reflecting in themselves not what is, but what is not,

¹⁷. According to Nyssa, this work treats of perfection in general, but because 'the virtuous life should have for its substructure the love of virginity' this virtue is treated at length and emphasized throughout.

¹⁸. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, Introduction (GNO VIII,I, 247,4-6).

¹⁹. Ibid. 2,3 (GNO VIII,I, 255,7-13).

²⁰. Cf. T. Zeses, op.cit. 93-96; M. Aubineau, SC 119, 161-163.

²¹. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 12,2, 6-7 (GNO VIII,I, 298,5-6).

²². Ibid. 12,2,1-17 (GNO VIII,I, 298,12).

what is only their own delusion or deceit. Nyssa quotes the book of Wisdom to substantiate his point: 'God did not make death.'²³ Death and vice are somehow equivalent and both are the result of human delusion. Nyssa uses an analogy with light to explain what he means. All who see can 'participate' in the sun's light. If they close their eyes, it is not as though the sun goes away and produces darkness. Nor their ability to see disappear, but their own action blocks the visual power from working.²⁴ However, though evil has no real substance or being, it has great power in human affairs. The confusion of humans trying to live apart from the light of God is an 'activity of darkness'²⁵. Our beauty is covered just as though we had fallen into the mud; we have to wash away this 'veil of earth'.²⁶ The goal of the teaching on virginity is to encourage us to seek this experience for ourselves, to remove the veil.²⁷

Nyssa explains that Christ in Luke 17,21 teaches 'to those who can hear' about such a return to our original beauty when he says that 'the Kingdom of God is within us'. 'For I think scripture shows to him (who can hear) that the goodness of God is neither separate from our nature nor far from those who seek it, but is always in each, unrecognized and unnoticed whenever it is choked by the cares and pleasures of life, but discovered anew whenever we turn our thought to that (goodness).'²⁸ Nyssa also uses the parable of the lost drachma to explain that 'there is no profit from the rest of the virtues, which scripture calls drachmas, unless all are present'. The woman who loses the coin lights a lamp to look for it, 'perhaps indicating that reason brings to life hidden things.' She looks for the coin in her own house, in herself. The drachma, 'the image of the king' is not entirely lost, but is covered with manure, which Gregory sees to mean the dirtiness of the soul. When the soul is 'swept off and purified by attention, what she seeks becomes obvious'. She calls in all the neighbours to rejoice with her, meaning for Gregory that the powers of faculties of the soul -the rational, the appetitive, and the 'innate disposition of grief and anger'- all look to the beautiful and no longer become the instruments of sin.²⁹

²³. Ibid. 12,2,20 (GNO VIII,I 298,19); *Wisdom*, 1,13.

²⁴. Ibid. 12,2,22-32 (GNO VIII,I, 298,21-299,3); Ibid. 12,2,35-43 (GNO VIII,I, 299,3-12).

²⁵. Ibid. 12,2,31 (GNO VIII,I, 299,2).

²⁶. Ibid. 12,2,54-63 (GNO VIII,I, 300,4).

²⁷. Cf.E.Pagels, op.cit., chapter, IV, 'The Paradise of Virginity Regained', 78-97.

²⁸. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 12,3,4-13 (GNO VIII,I, 300,16-25).

²⁹. Ibid. 12,3,13-44 (GNO VIII,I, 300,25-302,4). Cf.M.Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 273.

The Cappadocians often oppose the life according to the flesh to the true and divine or angelic life. Having described virginity as the first step on the return to paradise, Gregory of Nyssa asks, since paradise is the dwelling place of the living which does not admit those who are dead by sin, how we can return there. He finds the answer in the Gospel: we must be born from the Spirit, who is vivifying. Hence giving up the life according to the flesh we have to seek the life in virginity, for whereas the result of carnal intercourse is the production of mortal beings, the result of the communion with the Holy Spirit is life and incorruptibility.³⁰ Basil of Caesarea in the same respect says that we should get rid of the 'desire of the flesh'.³¹ A return to paradise for Basil comprises the following elements: we must rid ourselves from all 'the anxiety of life' (βιωτική μέριμνα),³² from all slavery to the senses and to the passions (πάθη) of the body;³³ Renunciation and virginity help in this direction.³⁴ Purification and askesis lead towards Christian perfection and knowledge of God. A katharsis of both soul and body is required for man to be able to receive the truth of God which is revealed in His Christ.³⁵

For Nazianzen in the same way the task of the spiritual life is set for man from the moment of his creation, and is impeded, but not fundamentally altered, by the fall. It involves renunciation, particularly since the fall, when man's body has become 'coarsened' and now offers a more severe impediment to his inner spirit.³⁶ Virginity helps the freeing of the image of God within man from the depressing power of matter and bringing it back to its aboriginal state as a reflection of the divine archetype: '... the internal warfare within ourselves and in our passions, in which we are engaged night and day against the body of our humiliation, either secretly or openly, and against the tide which tosses us back and forth, by the aid of our senses and other sources of pleasure of this life; and against the clay in which we have been fixed and against the law of sin which wars against the law of the spirit, and strives to destroy the royal image in us and all the divine emanation which has been bestowed

³⁰. Cf. D.Balas, op.cit. 88.

³¹. Basil of Caesarea, *Long Rules*, 269 (PG 31,1268BC). Cf. *ibid.* 20 (PG 31,1096D-97A); *In Psalm 28,5* (PG 29,293D-97A); Cf. M.Aghiorgoussis, 'Image as Sign of God', 51.

³². Basil of Caesarea, *Letter 2,2* (R.Deferrari, v.i, 8-10). Cf. *Long Rules*, 5,1 (PG 31,920C-21A); *ibid.* 8,2 (PG 31,937C); *Short Rules*, 218 (PG 31,1228A); *In Psalm 33,1* (PG 29,353BC); *ibid.* 3 (PG 29,357B); *In Psalm 45,8* (PG 29,428C-29A); and *In Psalm 48,11* (PG 29, 457B).

³³. Basil of Caesarea, *In Psalm 33,3* (PG 29,357AC); *In Psalm 45,8* (PG 29,428C); *In Psalm 48,11* (PG 29,460A); *On the Holy Spirit*, 22,53 (SC 17,212).

³⁴. M.Aghiorgoussis, 'Image as Sign of God', 51.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 50.

³⁶. R.Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 136.

upon us.'³⁷ The virgin body was 'an appropriate mirror, in which human beings could catch a glimpse of the immense purity of the image of God'.³⁸ The virgin's flesh was 'both a mirror of the purity of her soul and a physical image of the virgin earth of the garden of Eden'.³⁹ The 'Fourth Cappadocian', Macrina, was hoping that she 'might come to rest beside clear streams in the "grassy garden of delight";' for her own, untouched body was already 'heavy with a sense of the unseen luxuriance of Paradise'.⁴⁰

Nyssa discusses extensively the return to paradise in terms of marriage and virginity in chapter 13 of his *On Virginity*:

'So if we want to depart from here and be with Christ, we must begin at the end of the route of departure, just like exiles from their homes, when they return to the place from which they began, first leave that place which they encountered last in coming. Since marriage is the last step of the separation from the life of paradise, scripture indicates for those departing in the direction of Christ that they leave it behind as the furthest outpost. Then it says to withdraw from labour concerning the earth, to which man was set after his sin, and after this to come out of the coverings of the flesh by taking off the dead skins, which are the concerns of the flesh, and, by renouncing all the hidden things of shame, to no longer be covered with the fig leaves of the bitter life, but, throwing away the coverings made from the transitory leaves of life, to be again before the eyes of the creator, to drive away the delusion of taste and sight, no longer to take the advice of the poisonous snake, but to hold to the one command of God. This is to fasten oneself to the beautiful alone and to drive away the taste of wickedness, since the sequence of the vices takes its beginning for us from not wishing to be ignorant of vice.'⁴¹

Here Nyssa uses the terms 'marriage' and 'virginity' on two different levels at once, meaning both married and celibate states of life on the one hand and the state of one's soul as attached or dispassioned on the other. The passage quoted above might seem to imply that virginity is a prerequisite for the return to paradise. However, if we study carefully what Nyssa says in other places in his treatise, we see that virginity in the sense of the celibate state of life is not an absolute requirement. He sees the work

37. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.2,91* (SC 247, 206-208).

38. This is a Platonic concept that found its way in the Cappadocian teaching. 'To be effective, a method had also to be a mirror.' Cf.P.Brown, *The Body and Society*, 299.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid. 300. This is an idea that survived in the following centuries. Byzantine nuns had the same insight that Macrina had. Cf.C.Christakis, 'The First Documented Organised Community of Women Virgins in the Greek World', *Orthodox Herald* 52-53, (1993), 27-28.

41. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 13,1,1-22 (GNO VIII,I, 303,4-304,2).

involved with marriage and family to be a legitimate and important public ministry (λειτουργία). Nor does he mean to simply stop working when he speaks about 'withdrawal from labour concerning the earth'; Nyssa considers idleness as one of the problems in ascetic practice.⁴²

Despite the positive view of marriage by the Cappadocians, to cease from it and practice virginity can be an important step in unmasking it as an attachment. Without the consolation we receive from marriage we perceive more clearly our fallen condition. By virginity, by giving up marriage and achievement in the world and experiencing the suffering of that loss we come to see that our achieving was not a rational choice of the good, but an irrational attachment, not an action, but a passion. Virginity is thus a way to intensify one's awareness of one's ties to those things that arise and pass away. Once our business in the world is seen as passion we may further see the fear and shame that give rise to passion. And when we realize our fear and shame, we may prefer to be without the attachment and begin to see the unsatisfactory character of all which meets our senses. We learn to attach ourselves to the beauty which shines through all the things which change, not to the things themselves, that is to attach ourselves only to God, and seek the good in that which is without change.

Thus, the Cappadocians distinguish between true moderation and the enforced moderation of one who renounces and withdraws from the ordinary circumstances of life. In true moderation, the soul knows the true value of things and is not tempted to become enmeshed in the pursuit of wealth or honour no matter what the situation in life. Nyssa sees this principle stated in the parable of the lost drachma. Without the ability of the mind to reflect what truly is, without true wisdom, all the other virtues are worthless. One attains this wisdom not by accepting the teaching of another, but by turning one's attention to the soul and discovering there the principle of its operation. In such a movement the 'dirt' covering the soul is removed. 'Dirt' enters the soul through a misunderstanding of the material and sensible world, giving to it a permanence and substantiality which it does not have. Once we see through this basic delusion, the natural unity of the soul returns and the power of desire which had previously attached to the material world now find their 'divine joy and felicity' in gazing upon the beautiful.⁴³

⁴². Ibid. 23,3,15-21 (GNO VIII,1, 337,8-14).

⁴³. Cf. M. Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 274.

Wisdom for Nyssa is primarily insight into the impermanent character of all things which are beautiful and the uncovering of the one Beauty to which we are always united in our very ability to recognize beauty. This discovery is not merely 'rational'. We do not merely understand something 'intellectually' about the beautiful and then continue to battle ignorant bodily passions in the light of this knowledge. If the passions arise when the highest in us (which by nature seeks the immortal) attempts to satisfy itself against nature through the body, then wisdom about the nature of things must alter our affections themselves. By noticing impermanence and letting go of our desires in the world, we are experiencing our original unity of soul. This σύνεσις or understanding of God is beyond what we can know by reason. It consists of 'being with' God, in a presence of God, which is at the same time a satisfaction. We can return to the original condition of Adam, through the discovery of the image of God in ourselves. The discovery of the image means the restoration of our original condition. For Nyssa this is not purely an eschatological possibility, reserved for the end of time, but in some sense we can enjoy the fruits of the resurrection now.⁴⁴ In returning to this state, we become 'naked of our coverings of dead skins' that is we shed the passions which result from the powers of the soul being turned toward the sensible for their satisfaction. Moreover, we can look at the face of God with confidence (ἐν παρρησίᾳ) and once again judge the beautiful in purity. For Adam did not judge the beautiful by taste or sight, but rather 'ate sumptuously of the Lord'⁴⁵ and 'had dealings with the helpmate given him toward this end'.⁴⁶

It is possible for us to return to this state by retracing the steps by which we left paradise. For Nyssa, vice follows a certain sequence (ἀκολουθία)⁴⁷ from its principle, and the story of the sin of Adam and Eve illustrates this sequence: 'What is this sequence? At that time pleasure, introduced by delusion, began the falling away. Then shame and fear followed the passion of pleasure, and they no longer dared to be

⁴⁴. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 14,4,7-15 (GNO VIII,I, 309,2-9).

⁴⁵. Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection* (PG 46,136A).

⁴⁶. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 12,4,8-9 GNO VIII,I, 302,12-13).

⁴⁷. On the various uses of ἀκολουθία see J.Daniélou, ' 'Ακολουθία chez Grégoire de Nysse', *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 27 (1953), 219-249; Cf. D.Blank, op.cit. 80. Blank argues that Gregory's account of humankind in Paradise and of the Fall is based on the similar theories of Posidonius and Philo, op.cit. (83-84). However, neither Posidonius nor Philo had anything like Gregory's notion that one can by reversing the steps of the fall, recapture the original nature. The ἀκολουθία of the return to paradise is Gregory's original idea.

before the eyes of the creator, but hid themselves with leaves and shade. They covered themselves after this with dead skins and thus were banished to this irritating and exacting place in which marriage was contrived as a consolation for death.⁴⁸

The first step away from paradise, in which pleasure is introduced by delusion, is a falling away from that positive state Nyssa calls 'judging the beautiful in purity'. We may think of pleasure as an intrinsic part of bodily nature and expect it to have been a part of human experience from the beginning. However, Gregory conceives of pleasure as something which is not a function of bodily nature, but something of our own creation, something added to our nature by deceit or delusion. He gives to pleasure a distinctive meaning. He does not restrict it to sense pleasure alone. He is in fact far more concerned with the mental pleasures of immortality and security which are associated with vanity and greed. In the strictest sense of the term, pleasure for Gregory means 'eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil', which has the character of presenting evil under the aspect of good. The pleasure of honour and greed depends upon the illusion of immortality they create, and apart from this delusion there is no pleasure in honour or greed. In honour and greed, fame and possession- are perceived to be capable of endowing us with a certain immortality and permanence. Thus, rather than being content to the incorruptibility of God, we seek the incorruptible among corruptible realities. This applies as well to the pleasures of marriage in so far as we seek in human intercourse, both social and sexual, a connection with something immortal.

48. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 12,4,13-23 (GNO VIII,I, 302,20-27). D.Blank, (op.cit. 82) shows that Gregory's description of the steps by which humankind descends into the depths of sinfulness and his characterization of these steps as having a necessary order are designed to assimilate these aspects of life to scientific phenomena and the moral theologian to a scientist or craftsman. Gregory is not the first theologian to use this scientific methodology. Clement of Alexandria did the same. Especially interesting is the connection with medical science with its conception of nature as a norm or original condition which can be lost or regained. In this way medical science becomes a good parallel for Gregory's science of redemption. Both provide for a loss of the natural state and for a scientific guiding back to the original condition. The difference is that medicine does not parallel the actual steps of the sequence of descent into sinfulness or Gregory's insistence that we must reverse these steps one by one. Cf.J.Janini Cuesta, *La antropología y la Medicina Pastoral de San Gregorio de Nisa* (Madrid, 1946), 71-75; Janini Cuesta notes the works of Galen which Gregory presumably used, op.cit. 29f; M.Aubineau, SC 119, 528, n.1. Finally, another ancient science which contains a theory of degeneration and a procedure of correction parallel to the one that Gregory shows in his *On Virginity* is grammar. Gregory compares linguistic and spiritual progress. Like medicine, although less frequently, Nyssa uses grammar to exemplify scientific procedure. As a foreigner learns a new language best when native speakers correct him, one cannot learn the accurate facts of this life except by being guided by one who is correct, *On Virginity*, 23,2,1-10. (GNO VIII,I, 334,14-24).

The experience of shame and fear follows the experience of pleasure through delusion and is a falling away from the positive state of Adam in paradise which Gregory of Nyssa calls παρρησία, confidence or freedom to speak. The return to paradise is the return of the soul to familiarity or friendship with God once it has been purified of passion. Παρρησία is thus the freedom implied by ἀπάθεια and the return to the authority of one's own judgment which is a part of being in the image of God.⁴⁹

The Cappadocians teach that the nature of all which is sensible and material is to come into being in time and then later dissolve. Social realities such as family, marriage, honour and social position similarly arise and pass away. When we identify the good with the possession of things which are impermanent, we are immediately faced with the possibility of losing the good. When evil comes to mean the loss of that to which we are attached, the tranquillity of apatheia is lost.⁵⁰ Life becomes instead 'the activity of darkness', the struggle to prevent the inevitable. Our attachment thus creates the experience of evil. Our passions exile us to a different place. Marriage, that is attachment, is our means of comfort as well as the bond of our affliction.

Furthermore, with the judgment of the good according to pleasure comes the split between doing what is right and doing what one pleases. Unlike the freedom of choice in the original state, in the fallen condition one's own judgment of good conflicts with the divine judgment of the good. Fear is the experience of the impermanence of the world as hostile to happiness and shame is the conflict between 'happiness' and what is honourable. In both respects we lost our confidence and no longer dare to appear before the eyes of God. We can no longer stand the full light of the truth. But in the absence of this truth we move ever more blindly and irrationally towards those things we believe will bring us happiness. Nyssa asserts that those who practice virginity share in this present life the blessings of the resurrection. Resurrection is precisely the restoration of the state we enjoyed in paradise. In the resurrection of Christ God unites body and soul into a union which remains forever.⁵¹ This occurs in Christ 'so that the original grace of humanity might be

⁴⁹. Cf.M.Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 280.

⁵⁰. Cf.Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration*, 7 (PG 45,32C).

⁵¹. Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration*, 16 (PG 45,52B).

recalled'.⁵² When we separate the body and the soul, that is when we cease to look for the permanence and immortality in things that arise and pass away, we can turn again as in paradise to the matters of the body with a new freedom from attachment through virginity.

In this way Cappadocian theology offers a method of virginity through celibacy and physical withdrawal from social intercourse and obligations. This is different from Plotinus' method of becoming divine, his method of purification through *σύνεσις*.⁵³ The Cappadocian goal is not simply an interior freedom from bodily passions which allows full devotion to intellectual life. The immortal form of generation for Nyssa occurs 'whenever anyone conceives in the living core of his heart the incorruptibility of the Holy Spirit, giving birth to wisdom and justice, sanctity and redemption.'⁵⁴

The return to paradise for the Cappadocians does not mean a preference of the life of mind to the life of the body as a pagan philosopher would say. The Christian approach is directed by the example of Christ who suffered the burden of our sins, establishing the principle that the higher should serve the lower. The true incorruptibility at which virginity aims puts to shame the tendency to identify 'evil' with hardship rather than vice and reveals the pride which lies in the attempt to separate oneself from any part of the whole. The resurrected unity of body and soul is the 'incorruptibility of the Spirit' and the one vehicle which can carry us to the divine is 'assimilation to the form of the descending dove'⁵⁵ what Gregory of Nyssa calls 'the philanthropic economy of the Holy Spirit'.⁵⁶

Thus, the return to paradise through virginity is not merely a move towards one's own purification, but works toward both the completion of the human race and spiritual restoration of the whole body of humanity to its original unity and grace through a life of service. Nyssa explains that the image of God is not merely something individual, but something which 'embraces the entire fullness of humanity

⁵². Ibid. (PG 45,52CD).

⁵³. For Plotinus' idea in this respect see, M.Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 235-243.

⁵⁴. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 14,3,16-19 (GNO VIII,I, 308,14-17).

⁵⁵. Ibid. 11,4,6-8 (GNO VIII,I, 294,12-14).

⁵⁶. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, 8 (GNO II, 197,8).

in one body'.⁵⁷ The restoration of the image to its original condition, our return to the blessed life free of passion, belongs in the strictest sense to the completion of everything.⁵⁸ In this life the restoration to the original condition occurs through our abandoning of hope in a false immortality. Virginity can be of great assistance in this process.

In this context of the soteriology of virginity of the Cappadocians, I examine in the following chapters the connection between virginity and apatheia, the person of Christ as the Archvirgin and the role of the Virgin Mary in the salvation of humankind.

⁵⁷. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man*, 16 (PG 44,185CD).

⁵⁸. Cf. Ibid. 22,2 (PG 44,204C).

B.

VIRGINITY AND APATHEIA

The tyranny of sensation and passions, as an obstacle in the pathway to the Christian ideal, is a common notion in early Christian writings on virginity and chastity. Struggling against the passions and towards virtue, man earns the *apatheia* (ἀπάθεια) and the likeness of God. *Apatheia* is one of the main characteristics of the Cappadocian teaching generally and especially of their teaching on virginity.¹ The term comes from the stoic philosophy.² In Stoicism and Cynicism the goal of asceticism is freedom. The external world is seen as an impersonal order beyond human control. Freedom is found in *apatheia*. Man cannot control destiny, but he can control his relation to destiny. By loosening the bonds of either hope or fear which tie him to the course of events, he can be free and tranquil within.³ In order to achieve the calmness of the soul, man has to get rid of the passions that prevent the rule of the reason on the soul. Passion and reason are natural adversaries. The goal of human life is to become λογική and ἀπαθής, (reasonable/logical and without passions).⁴

Clement of Alexandria was the first Christian writer who adopted the term *apatheia*.⁵ For him the true gnostic is someone who 'shares the passions of the body, whose nature is bound up with passion, but is not primarily motivated by passion'.⁶ With this term Clement means the self-constraint that is achieved by the grace of God

¹. For a summary of the history of the notion of *apatheia* see: G.Bardy, 'Apatheia', *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* (Paris, 1937), 727-746. The Western Fathers were not as enthusiastic as the Eastern Fathers about this emphasis on *apatheia*. Cf. P. Brown, *The Body and Society*, 386. However, it seems that Jerome misunderstood Evagrius' position. Cf. A. Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition. From Plato to Denys* (Oxford, 1981), 103.

². Cf. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy* (New York, 1974), 178.

³. Cf. R. Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 10-11.

⁴. D. Tsamis, *The dialectical character of the teaching of Gregory the Theologian*, 53.

⁵. For an account of Clement's view on passions and *apatheia*, see P. Brown, *The Body and Society*, 129-131.

⁶. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 7,11,62 (BEPES 8,274). Nyssa will reform this concept of the married Gnostic in the notion of the true virgin.

and he distinguishes two characteristics of it: the taming of the fallen human nature and the obedience to God's will. Thus, man reaches a still condition, which is a foretaste of the eternity. The ideal of *apatheia* in Clement is not limited to virginity, but also refers to marriage. Neither marriage, nor virginity are connected exclusively with salvation, but *apatheia* and virtue are.⁷ Origen does not refer as much to *apatheia* as to *metriopatheia*, the restraint to be imposed to the passions.⁸ These terms do not express an entirely negative idea as some propose.⁹ They rather denote the preservation of the independence of the soul freed from the terrestrial and passionate element.¹⁰

The Cappadocians kept the stoic terminology, but they gave it a different meaning according to their anthropological presuppositions.¹¹ *Apatheia* is the restoration of the balance of the soul that was destroyed by sin. The connection of love with *apatheia* by Origen was an important element that found fuller expansion in the teaching of Basil of Caesarea. The other two Cappadocians Gregory Nazianzen and Gregory of Nyssa connect closely the *apatheia* of Origen with virginity. Man 'leaves' the fallen world and follows a life in Christ.¹² For Nyssa the restoration of virginity is achieved by *apatheia*, by the freedom from the slavery of passions.¹³ Thus, the perfection of virginity is achieved with the union with God.¹⁴ The very first and most essential aspect of the life of *θέωσις* is *κάθαρσις*, that is, 'a contrite heart' a 'new creation in Christ' and the new man,¹⁵ the separation of the soul from

7. Ibid. 4,12-13 (BENIEZ 8, 144-149). Cf. T. Zeses, *Marriage and Virginity in the Patristic Works on Virginity*, 178-179.

8. H. Crouzel, *Origen* (Edinburgh, 1989), 7.

9. E. Castelli, 'Virginity and its Meaning for Women's Sexuality in Early Christianity', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 2:1 (Spring 1986), 74.

10. F. Palmieri, *op.cit.* 401.

11. Cf. J. Daniélou, *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique*, 99-110; A. Armstrong, 'Platonic Elements in St. Gregory of Nyssa's Doctrine of Man', 123. There are passages that an apparent stoic terminology should not be overstressed. A. Meredith points to a passage from Nyssa's *De Tridui Spatio*, where most probably Gregory advocates self-restraint and where it will seem unwise to interpret his language in a stoic way. Thus, the apparent contradiction between the stoic language of the absence of passions and the language of Aristotle (*ἐγκράτεια*) which exists in Basil (*Long Rules* 16,2) is not present here. Cf. A. Meredith, 'The Answer to Jewish Objections (De Tridui Spatio, p. 294.14-298.18), (On the three-day period of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, GNO IX, 245-270)', *The Easter Sermons of Gregory of Nyssa* A. Spira & C. Klock, (eds.) Intr. G.C. Stead (Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1981), 293-303.

12. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or. 19,1* (PG 35,1045A); *Or. 7,23* (SC 405,238-240).

13. O. Knackstedt, *op.cit.* 17-18. Cf. M. Aubineau, SC 119,166-171; J. Kirchmeyer, *op.cit.* 145.

14. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, chapter 2. For a discussion of Nyssa's connection of *apatheia* and virginity, see W. Völker, 'Virginität und Apathie als Höhepunkt asketischen Strebens bei Gregor von Nyssa' in *Festschrift für D. Cyceviskyi* (Berlin, 1954), 301-306.

15. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or. 16,2* (PG 35,936BC). Cf. *2Cor.* 5,17; *Eph.* 4,24.

the fleshly mind and the attainment of *apatheia*.¹⁶ Passions can be vanquished by faith, which leads to continence and finally to *apatheia*. Thanks to *apatheia* man becomes free and can develop in himself the divine agape.¹⁷

To yield to the passions is to commit adultery against God.¹⁸ Gregory of Nyssa elaborates liberation from passions in his biography of Macrina. At the tragic death of her brother Naucratus, Macrina uses reason (*λογισμός*) against passion (*πάθος*) to overcome her grief.¹⁹ One characteristic of the ascetic community created by Macrina at Annisa was the absence of passion. Having liberated themselves from passion, these virgins were above human nature. Macrina achieved the goal of *apatheia* just before her death. This *apatheia*, born out of devotion to Christ, should be so complete that the virgin lives an everyday death.²⁰ Nyssa likens the passions to those cavalry archers in Pharaoh's army who tumbled over one another in the Red Sea.²¹ Thus, *Apatheia* is the beginning and the groundwork of a life in accordance with virtue.²²

Apatheia is a theme also developed intensively in Nyssa's *On the Song of Songs*. *Apatheia* is a stripping-off of our garment of skin, our mortality. It is a habitual state of grace, that is to say, participation of the soul in the divine life. It has a supremely positive character and does not consist of the elimination of passions as

¹⁶ C.Tsirpanlis, *Introduction to Eastern Patristic Thought*, 169.

¹⁷ J.Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 120. Basil of Caesarea distinguishes three different kinds of passions 1) passions of the flesh, as the dissolution of the human body 2) passions of the living flesh, as the thirst and hunger and 3) passions of the flesh, as the sorrows and the worldly cares. The first two of them are natural and necessary because of the bodily nature of man, but the third is not. Cf.O.Papadopoulou-Tsanana, op.cit. 84. Christ accepted the first two natural passions as a reaffirming of his true human nature, but he rejected the third. Cf.*Epistle 261,3* (R.Deferrari, iv,80-82).

¹⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 16,1, 25-27 (GNO VIII,I, 312,15-17).

¹⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Macrina*, 9,2 (GNO VIII,I 380,18). Passions as grief over bereavement is a standard problem in Stoic discussions. Cf.C.Gregg, *Consolation Philosophy: Greek and Christian Paideia in Basil and the two Gregories*. Patristic Monograph Series, no.3. (Cambridge, Mass. 1975) ch. 1&2 and chapter 3: The problem of appropriate grief, ἀπάθεια and μετριοπάθεια. Cf.A.Meredith, 'The concept of mind in Gregory of Nyssa and the Neoplatonists', 47-50 for a good discussion of Nyssa's teaching on passions in comparison with Plotinus. Meredith shows some important areas of similarity, but he also notes certain factors that distinguish Nyssa's thought from that of Plotinus. Nyssa also speaks in medical language when he describes the taming of the passions. [*Canonical Letter* (PG 45,224A-225B)]. Cf.J.Janini Cuesta, *La antropología y la medicina pastoral de san Gregorio de Nisa*. The general notion of 'therapy' for the soul by the taming of the passions can be traced back to Galen: P.Harkin, *Galen on the Passions and Errors of the Soul* (Ohio State University Press, 1963). Cf.R.Williams, op.cit. 227, n.2.

²⁰ E.Castelli, op.cit. 4.

²¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, 2, 361 (GNO VII,I, 71,5-19).

²² Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration*, 6 (PG 45,29A).

such; rather apatheia coincides with the disappearance of vicious passions, or a mortification which accompanies the resurrection: 'The son in Proverbs is named a bride, and Wisdom is changed into the role of a bridegroom, so that a person might be espoused to God by becoming a pure virgin instead of a bridegroom. By clinging to the Lord he might become one spirit through a union with what is pure and free from passion (ἀπάθης).'²³ It is worth noting that apatheia in this passage above is connected with the reality of being married to God as a virgin. In this sense the two apparently contradictory elements of marriage and virginity are united. In the treatise *On Perfection*, apatheia represents the divinity in a creature: 'But a state free from passion looks to the author of detachment.'²⁴

Apatheia is especially important as a condition for a life such as the life of the angels. Apatheia allows us to know God, to know that his ousia transcends every act of our knowing. We obtain such knowledge in our souls which act like living mirrors: 'A person can look at the sun in himself as in mirror. For the rays of that true and divine virtue shine forth in a pure life by the outflow of detachment (ἀπάθεια) and make the invisible visible to us, and inaccessible comprehensible by depicting itself in the mirror of our souls.'²⁵ Apatheia diffuses itself as deifying light into every aspect of a person's being, so in this way it is identified with the virtues. Gregory sums up all that has been said above regarding virtue and apatheia in an important passage from the ninth homily *On the Song of Songs*. Virtues are seen here as a garment woven from many threads to form a whole. It is interesting to contrast this with the 'garment of skins': 'The end of virtuous life is likeness to God. Because of this, purity of soul and freedom from the disturbance of passion is exercised by attention to the virtues so that a certain form of the transcendent nature might become present in them due to their more refined way of life. Since the life of virtue is neither uniform nor the same, it is like the art of skillfully making a garment by weaving various threads: some threads are pulled straight and others drawn crossways against them. Therefore, it is necessary to have many elements concur to create a virtuous life.'²⁶

²³. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Song of Songs* (GNO VI, 23,1-6).

²⁴. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Perfection* (GNO VIII,I, 212,4-5). Cf.C.McCambley, 'Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Περί Τελειότητος', 355.

²⁵. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Song of Songs* (GNO VI, 90,11-16).

²⁶. Ibid. (GNO VI, 271,11-22).

In this context we should discuss a crucial question for the Cappadocian theology that is closely connected with the concept of virginity as *apatheia*:²⁷ How was divine *apatheia* as impassibility related to the divine begetting of the Son by the Father, which sounded very much like an instance of divine passibility? Answering this question, the Cappadocians insisted that the divine nature was passionless and incapable of suffering (*ἀπαθής*). The idea of virginity in the begetting assisted towards the impassibility of the Godhead. This doctrine of *apatheia* of the divine nature was also important in Christ's role. In Basil of Caesarea's words, through the suffering of the one who was *ἀπαθής* the gift of *apatheia* was conferred on passible mortals.²⁸ The divine nature, whatever it is believed to be, always remains the same, being above all augmentation and also being incapable of diminution.²⁹ This doctrine of the *apatheia* of the divine nature does not stand in contradiction with the suffering of Christ on the cross.³⁰ Against Eunomius who claimed that the deity of the Son suffers, while that of the Father is preserved in absolute *apatheia*,³¹ for the Cappadocians any predication of changing or becoming or being made affecting the Son had to apply to his humanity rather to his divinity.³²

But, *apatheia* is one of the qualities of God that were said to be shared by human nature as the image of God: 'purity, *apatheia*, blessedness, alienation from all evil ... mind and word ... and love ... and the power of apprehending things by means of sight and hearing, and an inquisitive and searching understanding about things'.³³ Nyssa provided a similar catalogue in his *Catechetical Oration*, assigning *apatheia*, whether divine or human, a normative place.³⁴

Original human existence was impassible par excellence. In it everything was perfectly natural. The goal of the Christian's spiritual life consists precisely of the acquisition of *apatheia*, which is a necessary condition for deification. In Paradise

27. W.Völker points out the similarities between *apatheia* and virginity in *Gregor von Nyssa als Mystiker*, 259-264.

28. Cf. Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*, 8,18 (SC 17,137).

29. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or. 25,17* (SC 284,198). See, also the chapter 'the theology of virginity'.

30. Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*, 8,18 (SC 17,137); *Ep. 261,3* (R.Deferrari, iv,80-82).

31. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, 3,4,5 (GNO II,135). Eunomius and his disciples were arguing on the grounds of the nature of the Father as having remained pure in its *apatheia* also after the incarnation when they separated the Son from the Father ontologically, in order to be able to predicate of the Son that he underwent the humiliation of the cross: the one who was crucified could not be metaphysically of the same being as the God of *apatheia*.

32. Cf. J. Pelican, *op.cit.* 189-190 & 273-274.

33. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man*, 5 (PG 44,137).

34. Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration*, 6 (PG 45,28-29).

Adam was in *apatheia*. The angelic life of Adam and his *apatheia* stand in a directly causal relationship with the fact of Adam's prelapsarian virginity: Adam's perfect *apatheia* is considered a property of the angelic life, but Adam possessed the angelic life because he was a virgin. Christ without passion fought death so that he will grant us *apatheia* by his own passion.³⁵

In the Greek of the Cappadocians³⁶ as well in English,³⁷ passion (*πάθος*, *πάθημα*) could often connote sexuality.³⁸ Its sexual connotations meant that the concept of *apatheia* as freedom from passion was connected with the Cappadocian teaching on the place of sexuality in the doctrine of the image of God and the restoration of the human nature. On the background of this teaching lie two basic scriptural texts, Galatians 3,28 and Luke 20,34-36. It was clear to Nyssa that the resurrection life, like the angelic life, would be a life free of the constraints of sexuality and, that the 'blessing of this promise'³⁹ could become a reality now for someone who was living the 'life equal to that of the angels', the life of virginity, in the present aeon.⁴⁰ This expectation of the angelic life without sexuality after the resurrection had implications for the connection between sexuality and the original image of God and made Gregory of Nyssa develop his theory about the double creation. The doctrine of the image of God necessarily implied that 'humanity by nature was free from passion, for it was a copy of the one who was without passion.'⁴¹ *Apatheia* was, therefore, part of the content of the original image, as was freedom from death.⁴²

Physical appetites for food or sex reach a satiety (*κόρος*) of pleasure and began to pall; but the life in God, the possession of arete, once firmly established, differed fundamentally, being 'neither circumscribed by time nor limited by satiety' (*οὐ χρόνῳ μετρεῖται οὐδέ κόρῳ περιορίζεται*).⁴³ In Macrina's words,

³⁵. Basil Of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*, 8,18 (SC 17,137); *Psalms* 44,5 (PG 29,400B).

³⁶. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 20,9 (SC 270,74); *Or.* 23,10 (SC 270,300).

³⁷. J.Murray et al. (eds.), *The Oxford English Dictionary*, (1933) v.7-II:533-534.

³⁸. This is not the case always, as it is evident from its use by the Cappadocians for the sufferings of Christ on the cross. Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Apollinaris*. Cf. also Basil's Liturgy where the sufferings of Christ are passions.

³⁹. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 14,4,10-11 (GNO VIII,I, 309,5-6).

⁴⁰. Ibid. 14,4,15 (GNO VIII,I 309,10). For a more detailed account of the anthropology of the Cappadocians see the chapter 'The anthropology of Virginity'.

⁴¹. Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration*, 6 (PG 45,29B).

⁴². Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation*, 5 (PG 44,137).

⁴³. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Beatitudes*, 4 (GNO VII,II, 121,1). The general observation about satiety and food and sexual appetite came in the course of a commentary on the fourth Beatitude

'The life of the Supreme Being is love, seeing that the καλόν is necessarily lovable to those who recognize it, and the Deity does recognize it, and so this recognition becomes love, that which he recognizes being essentially καλόν. This true καλόν the hybris of satiety cannot touch.'⁴⁴

Apatheia as image of God in resurrection is stressed by the Cappadocians. According to Gregory of Nyssa death refashions 'human nature once more by means of the resurrection into a sound creature, apathes, pure, and with no admixture of evil, after this has been eliminated by the dissolution of body and soul'.⁴⁵ In the death of the body, passion died with it; but when the body was raised, passion remained dead and life was free of it. As a constituent of the metamorphosis of humanity, such an *apatheia* was the counterpart to the freedom of the will as a constituent of the image of God, and was in fact the means through which the will could regain its freedom after sin.⁴⁶ J. Daniélou points out⁴⁷ that in Gregory there are two forms of *apatheia*: one is eschatological or the stripping of mortality and sexuality on the biological level, while the other is not destructive, but uses passions for the restoration of the destroyed order in the soul, that is, to submit them to νοῦς (mind, intelligence). Thus, in the words of *the Life of Moses*, 'what is mutable and subject to passions was transformed into impassibility through its participation in the immutable.'⁴⁸

For Gregory Nazianzen man's original freedom and self-determination⁴⁹ could be threatened by the conflict he described between 'pleasure' and the 'gift of reason' namely, of the reason by which it was possible to conquer pleasure and passion.⁵⁰ When it remained unrestrained, passion caused 'carnal and earthly

(Mt.5,6): 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst to see right prevail; they shall be satisfied' which seem to be saying that the hunger and thirst would attain satiety/satisfaction. But the content of this was shaped by the sixth Beatitude (Mt.5,8): 'Blessed are those whose hearts are pure; they shall see God.' Commenting on those words, Gregory of Nyssa defined the vision of God promised as 'life without end, eternal incorruption, undying beatitude.' *On the Beatitudes*, 6 (GNO VII,II, 138,18-19).

⁴⁴ Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection* (PG 46,96).

⁴⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration*, 35,7 (PG 45,88D-89A).

⁴⁶ J. Pelican, op.cit. 290. For a further discussion of the implications of Gregory's notion of *apatheia* on his anthropology and theology of grace, see J.O'Keefe, Sin, 'Απάθεια and Freedom of the Will in Gregory of Nyssa', *Studia Patristica XXII* (Leuven, 1989), 52-59.

⁴⁷ J. Daniélou, *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique*, 68.

⁴⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses* (GNO VII,I, 42,8-9). Cf. C. McCambley, 'Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Περί Τελειότητος', 355.

⁴⁹ Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.14,25* (PG 35,892).

⁵⁰ Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.45,18* (PG 36,648). For an extensive treatment of *apatheia* in Nazianzen see E. Panayotou, 'Le Trouble chez Saint Grégoire de Nazianze', *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ* 65 (1994), 293-299.

thoughts' which could alienate man from his creator.⁵¹ The balance that belonged to the original creation was upset 'when the concupiscent element gained the upper hand' over rational arete.⁵² Therefore, an essential component in the restoration of the divine image had to be the achievement of this freedom from passion, or, as Macrina called it, 'restoration to the state of an apathes blessedness'.⁵³ Paul's language about being 'dead to sin and alive to God, in union with Christ Jesus'⁵⁴ and his affirmation, 'The life I now live is not my life, but the life which Christ lives in me',⁵⁵ described a life that had, already in this present world, transcended 'passions' (παθήματα).⁵⁶

Thus, freedom from passion effects in the soul a close resemblance to Christ and brings about complete harmony of the passions: 'That which is pure from every passionate disposition looks toward the leader of "apatheia", who is Christ (τόν ἀρχηγόν τῆς ἀπαθείας ... ὅς ἐστίν ὁ Χριστός)'.⁵⁷ *Apatheia* probably signifies here generally the state of perfection in which the Christian has gained freedom from the disturbing influences of passion⁵⁸ and not especially the equivalent of the divine life as Daniélou thinks.⁵⁹

By transcending the passions, therefore, the asceticism of virgins, such as Macrina, had already approximated 'the angelic and immaterial nature' here and now, except in so far as they still appeared in bodily form.⁶⁰ That capacity to rise above physical constraints, including sexuality, had been true in a preeminent and unique sense of Christ, whose virgin birth and resurrection 'transcended our nature both in the manner of his birth and in not being subject to the change of corruption' at his death.⁶¹ On the other hand, as long as mind and logos had the upper hand, arete was possible in marriage as well in virginity.⁶² When Nazianzen stresses that what is important is the inner substance, not the external state of virginity, he equates the

51. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, 3,1,31 (GNO II,14).

52. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Lord's Prayer*, 4 (GNO VII,II, 45,20).

53. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection* (PG 46,148).

54. *Rom.* 6,11.

55. *Gal.* 2,20.

56. Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Song of Songs*, 15 (GNO VI, 440).

57. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Perfection* (GNO VIII,I, 212,4-5).

58. J.Muckle, op.cit. 58.

59. J.Daniélou, *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique*, 103; M.Keenan, op.cit. 204 n.73.

60. Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Macrina* (VIII,I, 382).

61. Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration*, 13 (PG 45,45A).

62. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 8,8 (SC 405,260,12-13).

virgin state with *apatheia* and with the loss of all fleshly will, all subservience to the passions.⁶³ The virgin state of life is to be embraced in preference to the married state because it is more conducive to *apatheia*, not because it automatically and necessarily confers it. It is possible to attain this ideal within the married state, but with greater difficulty, since the fact of existing in a 'carnal union' and being bound by concerns of children and worldly affairs is seen as an inherent obstacle. This obstacle can be overcome by living in the married state 'as if not'⁶⁴; that is, performing the duties of nature, but not allowing one's will and desire to settle there, so that these tasks become concerns and ends in themselves.⁶⁵

For the Cappadocians to attain ultimate perfection required not only that one be elevated to live 'in the sublime life', but that one attain, as far as it was possible, to the very vision of God. Life eternal meant immortality, but it also meant *apatheia*, which was 'likeness to God'.⁶⁶ Because it was a fundamental principle that the truly divine, unlike the gods of Olympus, was characterized by utter *apatheia*, it was necessary to conclude that someone always entangled in passion could not share in union with God.⁶⁷ However, the Cappadocians realise that 'a perfectly nonmaterial and passionless mode of life within the confines of a material existence' was impossible of attainment, and that God, as 'just lawgiver, could not in fairness have commanded things not permitted by nature'.⁶⁸ There was a measure of 'moderation and meekness', one that was beginning to approach the divine model though it had not reached it, which was attainable within the conditions of human existence; and the attainment of that constituted the life of *arete*: 'Blessed, therefore, are those who are not easily turned towards the passionate movements of the soul, but who are steadied by reason.'⁶⁹ To understand the life of *arete*, it was necessary to relate it

63. Cf.C.Tsirpanlis, 'Saint Gregory the Theologian on marriage and the family', *Patristic and Byzantine Review* 1 (1985), 34. Gregory Nazianzen in his oration in Caesarius develops the notion of *apatheia* in which the funeral orator declares the necessity of philosophic restrained of grief. However, he finally bursts out unable to restrain his feelings, in spite of his best efforts: 'Oh, how can I recall those days, without my tears showing that, contrary to my promises, my feelings have overcome my philosophic restraint?' Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.7,6* (SC 405,190).

64. *1 Cor.7,29*.

65. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.8,8* (SC 405,258-262). Cf.R.Ruther, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 141.

66. Gregory of Nyssa, *Song of Songs*, 2 (GNO VI,60).

67. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Lord's Prayer*, 1 (GNO VII,II, 16,17-20).

68. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Beatitudes*, 2 (GNO VII,II, 95,18-24).

69. *Ibid.* (GNO VII,II, 96,12-14).

simultaneously 'to the morally elegant life' within this world and to those things that were perceptible in the *apatheia* of the soul beyond this world.⁷⁰

True virginity is not 'separation of the world' in the literal sense of withdrawal from life's normal activity, but separation from the passions which tie one to the world. Οἱ ἀποταξάμενοι, those people to whom Gregory of Nyssa refers in the prologue of his *On Virginity* as having 'set themselves apart' from the world, are therefore properly speaking, only those whose lives are characterized by *apatheia*, freedom from passion, and not necessarily those who live a life of renunciation: '[Virginity is] not separated from anything of the divine and is joined with nothing of its opposite: for everything, as much as it comes by nature and by choice toward virtue is altogether ornamented by the purity of incorruptibility, and everything, as much as it is set apart from the opposite, is such and is called so by its distance from purity.'⁷¹

This invisible, spiritual condition of freedom from passion is virginity 'according to reason' (κατά λόγον παρθενευούσης)⁷². Virginity requires an interior purity of thought and heart to accompany its physical purity. To be virgin according to reason is opposed to being virgin only bodily (*σωματικῶς*). However, it is also to have freed the mind from the bonds of passion. Thus, to be virgin according to reason is opposed to being virgin according to passion, some sort of irrational practice of virginity, or even a purity of heart which is based upon certain conditions of life and is not the freedom from passion which an understanding of the nature of things brings under any conditions. Gregory probably is suggesting that two types of virginity are possible, one which is motivated by passionate attachments or without the freedom which comes through understanding and one which is motivated by 'the discernment of the beautiful in purity'. He also makes a similar distinction between types of marriage according to the passion or freedom from passion with which a couple enters marriage and the understanding or misunderstanding of the nature of the union into which they enter in marriage. Those who are married may also be '*virgins according to reason*' insofar as their insight into what is true and real has freed them from attachment.⁷³

⁷⁰. Cf. Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*, 8,18 (SC 17,138).

⁷¹. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity* 2, 1,13-18 (GNO VIII,I, 253,21-254,2).

⁷². Ibid. 2, 2,21 (GNO VIII,I, 254,27).

⁷³. M.Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 148.

The use of the term *apatheia* would normally exclude all vice and passion. However, Gregory of Nyssa teaches that virtue in the sense of *apatheia* is a middle ground, a mean between two vices.⁷⁴ Once we have understood how doing what is praiseworthy and doing what one desires conflict in the moral experience of most people, we can understand how *apatheia* can be also viewed as middle ground. To be without desire is to find a point of moderation between two conflicting desires. Gregory compares those who 'fight stubbornly the more shameful things of the pleasures' while 'hunting after pleasures in honours and love of ruling' with a slave who endeavours not to get free, but only to change masters.⁷⁵ But the lover of pleasure and the lover of honour are slaves to their passions, even though societies attach more shame to the former than to the latter.

Those who show too much zeal in opposing pleasure do not attain a freedom from passion, but rather slip into other passions: 'But there are again those who struggle well against the pleasures in many battles, but who give in somehow to the opposite passion, who, in delighting in the severity of their life, are prone to sorrows, irritations, holding grudges and other things which are substituted in opposition to the passions with respect to pleasure, and it becomes difficult for them to escape these other passions.'⁷⁶ Further, Gregory speaks about the notion of *apatheia* as a mean through an analogy between the health of the body and the health of the soul.⁷⁷ The mean of *apatheia* is not found in a balance between desire and aversion as such, but in wisdom and reason which allows us to view the events of life apart from the immediacy of what pleases us and gives us pain. Gregory asserts in this regard that his teaching of *apatheia* as a mean is really not his own, but that of Jesus in the scriptures.⁷⁸

For Nyssa, if virginity deifies us and allows us to participate in the freedom from passion which characterizes divine life, then the *apatheia* of the true virgin reflect the *philanthropia* which also characterizes the divine life.⁷⁹ Philanthropia concerns the attitude which one takes towards humankind. Freedom from passion

⁷⁴. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 17,2,22-23 (GNO VIII,I, 315,4-5).

⁷⁵. Ibid. 17, 1,1-9 (GNO VIII,I, 313,16-314,2).

⁷⁶. Ibid. 17, 1,9-17 (GNO VIII,I, 314,2-8).

⁷⁷. Ibid. 17,2,16-23 (GNO VIII,I, 314,26-313,5).

⁷⁸. Ibid. 17, 2,23-39 (GNO VIII,I, 315,5-20).

⁷⁹. M.Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 57.

according to Nyssa is not an attitude which remains away from the political needs of corporeal existence, but one which attends to them and loves community life in as much as it is oriented to the divine. One must not cling to the tranquillity of solitude, but be willing to enter the troubles of life for the sake of community. In his *Against Eunomius* Gregory tells that he does not write his reply out of concern for honour, for he would just as soon 'live an unoccupied and tranquil life', but that he descends into the contest with Eunomius over the Trinity because 'the city of God, the church is besieged.'⁸⁰

Gregory shows the distinctive *apatheia* of God who, out of *philanthropia*, love of humankind, does not cling to the divine freedom from passion, but is willing to descend to the weakness of human beings.⁸¹ In his analysis of the meaning of the incarnation in *Against Eunomius*, Gregory describes the 'economy of passion'. God unites in his love of humanity the *apatheia* of God and the human 'economy of passion' (*ἡ κατὰ τὸ πάθος οἰκονομία*). In order to clarify what he means, Gregory distinguishes between two meanings to the term 'passion'. 'Nothing is truly called passion unless it bears one toward sin, and one would not strictly call passion the routine which nature necessarily follows.' Thus the Lord undergoes the 'passion' of birth, nourishment, growth and fear of death, but these things are for him 'action' rather than 'passion', for he enters the 'economy of passion', not by weakness of nature, but by the power of his will.' What takes place in incarnation is therefore properly described, not as passion, but as *philanthropia*.⁸²

This concept of *philanthropia* is essential in order to understand the ideal of *apatheia* in Gregory of Nyssa. *Apatheia* detaches one's affections from the life of his family or nation, but it does not detach itself from family or nation for the sake of freedom from the burdens of bodily life, but for the sake of identifying oneself with a larger community, 'the city of God'. This can be the answer to the question whether there is any social aspect of virginity in Gregory of Nyssa or not, a question on which modern scholarship is divided. Most scholars like M.Aubineau⁸³ see no such

⁸⁰. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, 12,2 (GNO I, 228,6-14).

⁸¹. Ibid. (GNO I, 348,6-19). Cf. Augustine's *On Virginity* chapter 20 also stresses that virginity is not to avoid troubles, but to serve the Lord.

⁸². Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, 6,3 (GNO II, 143-147). Cf. Idem. *Catechetical Oration*, 16 (PG 45,49 B-C). Cf. B. Pottier, op.cit. 264-267.

⁸³. M.Aubineau, SC 119, 210.

an aspect in Nyssa, but others like M.Hart⁸⁴ disagree and point to several aspects of social dimensions in his theology of virginity.

Gregory Nazianzen develops the concept of *apatheia* further into the notion of *hesychia* and he also exalts the life of retirement and non involvement in worldly affairs.⁸⁵ To be involved in such a life is alien to the spirit by nature. But, Nazianzen in agreement with Nyssa does not condemn the life of action altogether and does not understand *apatheia* in a narrow sense.⁸⁶ The need for *hesychia* is shared by Basil of Caesarea, although in his case A.Meredith has shown that the pattern of Neoplatonic/Pythagorean withdrawal has entered into the fabric of his thought.⁸⁷

Basil emphasizes the communal and participatory aspect of ascetic practice in his organization of monasticism trying to answer to those who were giving up the Church to purify themselves and not giving up themselves to purify the Church. Basil uses also the term *apatheia*, not in a stoic way of an absolute tranquillity. On the contrary Basil considers such a tranquillity as a characteristic of the animals. *Apatheia* is a very active condition of abandoning sin and dedication to God. It denotes the return to the image of God and the view of God.⁸⁸ It is achieved with long and hard askesis a part of which theosis is.⁸⁹

The Cappadocians wrote about virginity in a time when the church was moving from a small minority to a church rapidly becoming the majority. The movement toward asceticism and renunciation was in part a response to this situation. One should withdraw from the community if he wants to remain truly holy and pure. Although we should not reduce the ascetic movement in such terms only; the above is partly true. Virginity could be seen in some instances as the attempt to purify oneself

⁸⁴. M.Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 160f.

⁸⁵. For Nazianzen's notion of *hesychia* see E.Panayotou, 'Le Trouble chez Saint Grégoire de Nazianze', *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ* 66 (1995), 127-149.

⁸⁶. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.7,7* (SC 405,192-196).

⁸⁷. A.Meredith, 'Asceticism-Christian and Greek', 326. Meredith compares Basil's concept of *hesychia* with Plotinus and Porphyry and shows their influence on Basil.

⁸⁸. Cf.O.Papadopoulou-Tsanana, op.cit. 111.

⁸⁹. 'Καί πάλιν κατά τήν τοῦ Θεοῦ εἰκόνα ἑαυτοῦς καλλωπίζωμεν, διὰ τῆς ἀπαθείας ὁμοιωθέντες τῷ κτίσαντι...' Basil of Caesarea, *Sermo Asceticus* (PG 31,869D-872A). Cf.*Long Rules*, quest.17,2 (PG 31,964B). The different meanings of the term *apatheia* in Basil of Caesarea in comparison with the Stoic use are examined in A.Dirking, 'Die Bedeutung des Wortes Apathie beim heiligen Basilius dem Grossen', *Theologische Quartalschrift* (Tübingen), 134 (1954), 202-212.

at the expense of the community, to substitute the individual virgin for the church. The purity of true virginity is not that of one who withdraws from those who are less free of passions, but that of one who imitates the divine *philanthropia* in being willing to serve the needs of those who are weaker.

Nyssa emphasizes in agreement with Basil and Nazianzen that the service to the church is compatible with the freedom from passion proper to divine life. The *apatheia* at which true virginity aims is that of *philanthropia* and *agape*. He calls *philanthropia* 'the proper and distinguishing characteristic' of God⁹⁰ and love 'the life of the nature above'⁹¹. He alternately lists *apatheia*⁹² and love⁹³ as the root of source of all of the rest of the virtues.⁹⁴ Thus, the view, that Gregory's concept of *apatheia* implies his longing for the 'freedom to be antisocial' in contrast with Marcus Aurelius, for whom virtue lies in submission to familial and social duties,⁹⁵ does not do justice to the text.⁹⁶

Nyssa also describes *apatheia* and the divine service of humanity in terms of humility:

'... the end of the life of virtue is to become like God. Yet a human being can by no means whatever imitate the purity that is without passion. For it is simply impossible that the life that is enmeshed in passions should become like the nature that is impervious to passions. ... There are, however, things belonging to the Godhead which are set up for the imitation of those who wish. Now what are these? It seems to me that by poverty of spirit the Word understands voluntarily humility. As an example of this the Apostle adduces the poverty of God when he says: "Who for us became poor, being rich, that we through His poverty might be rich." Now everything else that is being contemplated in the

⁹⁰. Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration*, 15 (PG 45,48A)

⁹¹. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and Resurrection* (PG 46,96C). This is not the case in the *Song of Songs I* (GNO VI, 18), (PG 44,764D) as M.Hart (*Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 163) claims, since the word ἀγάπη is not found in the critical edition: GNO text: μετά τῆς ἀγίας αὐτοῦ στολῆς; PG text: μετά τῆς ἀγάπης, αὐτοῦ στολῆς. This is one of the weak points of M.Hart's work which uses the Migne text.

⁹². Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration*, 6 (PG 45,29A).

⁹³. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Beatitudes*, 5 (GNO VII,II, 126,24-127,7); *On the Soul and Resurrection* (PG 46,96B).

⁹⁴. W.Völker, *Gregory von Nyssa als Mystiker*, 262. Cf. Clement of Alexandria according to whom the true gnostic unites *apatheia* and *agape*. Nygren showed that these are not two opposed tendencies, *apatheia* representing the Greek philosophical while *agape* represents the Christian contribution, but belong to a consistent line of thought and express one and the same tendency. A.Nygren, *op.cit.* 364.

⁹⁵. E.Pagels, *op.cit.* 83f.

⁹⁶. Cf. M.Hart, 'Gregory of Nyssa's Ironic Praise of the Celibate Life', 17 n.19.

divine nature surpasses the limits of human nature, but humility is connatural and as it were a brother to us who walk on the ground, who are composed of earth and again dissolve into earth.⁹⁷

Apatheia, as a mean between two vices, avoids the passion of pride in the separation from human weakness, which so often characterizes the pursuit of an angelic life, while at the same time avoiding the lust for possessions, pleasure and power, which so often accompanies the community life. 'The good which is proper and distinctive of the divine nature', which we share through purity and virginity is the ability to generate without passion. In other words, one is truly divine who can enter into relationships with others out of love and not only out of need and passion.⁹⁸ *Apatheia* is not merely the denial of passions in a negative way by ascetic discipline, but a redirection of the natural impulses of the soul and body toward their proper goal. This kind of dispassion is reachable by even those who are married and involved in public affairs.⁹⁹ According to Nyssa, 'the Lord does not bless those who live entirely free from passion', because such a state is contrary to man's material nature. What is required is resistance to the passions which 'inevitably arise from our nature, but which lead to condemnation only when purposefully consented to.'¹⁰⁰

The Cappadocians see in the mystic vision of God which takes place within the soul, the greatest possible knowledge of the supreme Beauty. Such an extraordinary grace is given only to those who have been prepared themselves for a return to the original image of God in man by katharsis, by a purification and a relentless battle against sin. They must continue to fight against the passions and the distractions of the world until the state of *apatheia* has been reached. This Cappadocian stress on the necessity for Christians to achieve *apatheia* is a logical necessity in a world where sin is conceived in terms of ignorance. Without *apatheia*, correct choices would be perpetually prevented by ignorance and the achievement of virtue would not be possible. Passions keep us irrational like beasts; virtue is a

⁹⁷. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Beatitudes*, 1 (GNO VII,II, 82,24-83,14).

⁹⁸. M.Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 164.

⁹⁹. This idea of *apatheia* is found in the Desert Fathers and it influenced most Eastern Fathers after the Cappadocians. Cf. John Climacus, *The Ladder*, 26,251; 5,129 and Evagrius Ponticus, *Praktikos*, 81,36; 33,25. Cf. A.Nygren, op.cit. 597-598, J.Quasten, *Patrology*, v.III, 510-511 and P.Brown, *The Body and Society*, 374-375.

¹⁰⁰. G.Gould, 'Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa on the Beatitudes', *Studia Patristica XXII*, (Leuven, 1989), 6.

function of the rational life.¹⁰¹ On the other hand, in response to Origen, the Cappadocians are forced to claim that human beings, before the fall, enjoyed *apatheia*. Spiritual man as image of God seems to include before the Fall impassibility.¹⁰² But humans in this life are certainly not in a state of impassibility.¹⁰³

The philanthropia that God shows in the incarnation makes clear the Cappadocian distinction between the sort of freedom from passion which merely escapes the troubles of life and that which is willing to assume them for the sake of others. Sexual experience is in principle compatible with the ideal of *apatheia* when it is possible to distinguish between that passion which is the result of vice and that passion which is a part of nature.¹⁰⁴ The Cappadocian Fathers accept Basil of Ancara's¹⁰⁵ notion of 'incorruptibility' as the freedom from passion which those who are 'truly virgin' enjoy in this life. But unlike Basil they do not base freedom from passion upon avoidance of contact and desire. The problem of virginity is the delusions we have concerning pleasure itself. Gregory of Nyssa, in chapter 3 of his *On Virginity*, argues that it is not marriage itself which inflames passion, but delusions about marriage which corrupt our very experience of marriage and prevent us from seeing it for what it really is. If we remove delusion from sexual attraction, it will return to natural proportions. It is not necessary to do violence to this aspect of nature as Basil of Ancara and others proposed, but simply to give it a moderate outlet through marriage.

Thus, for the Cappadocians, *apatheia* is equal to impassibility, but despite the obvious etymological connection is not apathy in the sense these terms are employed in modern English. For them, as G.Florovsky successfully remarked, *apatheia* 'is not an indifference, not a cold insensibility of the heart. On the contrary, it is an active state, a state of spiritual activity, which is acquired only after struggles and ordeals. It is rather an independence from passions. Each person's own 'I' is finally regained, freeing oneself from fatal bondage. But one can regain oneself only in God. True

¹⁰¹. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man* (PG 44, 192A).

¹⁰². Ibid. (PG 44, 177D-196B).

¹⁰³. Ibid. (PG 44, 180B-D).

¹⁰⁴. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, 6,3 (GNO II, 143-144); *Catechetical Oration*, 16 (PG 45, 49BC).

¹⁰⁵. Cf. T. van Eijk, *op.cit.* 224-227.

'impassibility' is achieved only in an encounter with the Living God.¹⁰⁶ Virginity as apatheia and likeness to God is not a static reality.

The following chapter will discuss further the notion of virginity for the Cappadocians, as this was exemplified by two exceptional virgins: Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary, who consecrated the pattern of virginity for both sexes.

¹⁰⁶. G.Florovsky, *Collected Works*, v.3 (Belmont, Mass. 1972), 88.

C.

CHRIST THE ARCHVIRGIN

The idea that virginity is an imitation of Christ is found already in the Apostolic Fathers and the Apologists. Virginity honours the flesh of Christ who in his life on earth remained virgin. The imitation of Christ contains already in Ignatius of Antioch the virtue of virginity.¹ The same idea is expressed in the Shepherd of Hermas. The life of Christ's flesh in purity and virginity was raised by God in glory. Every human flesh, that will follow Christ's example, will receive the same glory. That's why Shepherd's advice to Hermas is to keep his flesh clean and pure.² PseudoClement connects virginity with Christ's virgin life on earth.³ For Origen Christ is the prototype of the purity of men and his virgin mother of women.⁴ Moreover, Christ's virgin state in the Gospels was considered a characteristic of his prophetic role.⁵ According to Clement of Alexandria 'the reason that Jesus never married was that, in the first place, he was already engaged, so to speak, to the church; and, in the second place, he was not an ordinary man.'⁶ Athanasius finds one of the best proofs of the divinity of Christ in the fact that He has succeeded as no

¹ Ignatius of Antioch, *To Polycarp*, 5,2 (SC 10,174-176).

² *Shepherd of Hermas*, 5,6,5-8 (BEΠΕΣ 3,74); 7,1 (BEΠΕΣ 3,78).

³ According to the first epistle of pseudoClement *To the virgins*, the greatness of virginity is expressed by Christ's virgin birth. By virginity we imitate Christ, John the Baptist, John the Apostle, Paul, Barnabas, Timotheos and all the others who being sons of the living God followed Christ. We imitate also Elias and Elisaïos and many other saints who lived in purity. Virginity as imitation of Christ is imitation of Christ in all respects; in his words and his works, his thoughts, his patience, his pure heart, his faith, his perfect love for God. The virgin in body and in spirit is dedicated to the service of the Lord. Cf. T. Zeses, *Marriage and Celibacy in the Patristic Works on Virginity*, 173; Sophrony (Sakharov), 'Principles of Orthodox Asceticism', reprinted from *The Orthodox Ethos*, Studies in Orthodoxy vol.1 A. Philippou (ed.) (Oxford, 1964), 277.

⁴ Origen, *On Matthew 10,17* (SC 162,216).

⁵ For the connection between virginity and prophecy see N. Tsoulkanakis, op.cit. 385-397.

⁶ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, 3,6 (BEΠΕΣ 8,28,16-20).

other in winning humanity to the virtue of virginity.⁷ The spiritual life as expounded by the Alexandrians was solidly founded upon the imitation of Christ. This imitation of Christ in the area of virginity passed from the Alexandrian school to the Cappadocians.

Methodius of Olympus' emphasis on the virginity of Christ and his influence on the Cappadocians is significant. For Methodius one of the greatest losses of the human race was its inability, until the time of Christ, to be perfectly virgin. By God's providence, man evolved through a period when incest was allowed, through polygamy to monogamy. But only through Christ were men able to embrace virginity⁸. Christ by His death brought life to men; and it is by this life that His bride, the Mother Church, brings forth her children. Through her teachings men at last come to know the Trinity, and listen to that instruction which will help them to control their passions⁹. For it is thus, after baptism, that God wishes them to grow up with the features of Christ, that is, that men may become like God. For Methodius, incarnation is the means, the virgin life the end. The Logos left his Heavenly Father and descended to us in order, through His Incarnation and His Passion, to bring us to the stage of virginity. There, God's education of the human race achieves its end and the saving work of Christ its fulfillment. 'For truly by a great stretch of power the plant of Virginity was sent down to men from heaven.'¹⁰ Christ came to bring humanity to perfection. In both His teaching and life He has set before us the ideal of virginity, and so can rightly be called 'Αρχιπάρθενος (Archvirgin).¹¹ Salvation means the imitation in our own life of that virgin purity which Christ once manifested in His life. Christ was in some sense Adam.¹² Just as Adam was taken from the virgin earth at the creation of the world, so too was Christ born from a virgin mother when the world was re-created. Christ is the Archvirgin, and his virginal flesh is the

⁷. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 18 (SC 199,332). Cf. A. Nygren, *op.cit.* 429.

⁸. Methodius of Olympus, *Symposium* 1,4 (SC 95,62). Cf. Sophrony, *op.cit.* 276.

⁹. Ibid. 1,1 (SC 95,56).

¹⁰. Ibid. 1,2 (SC 95,56).

¹¹. Ibid. 1,5 (SC 95,64). In *Symposium* 1,4 (SC 95,62), Methodius asks: 'Why did no one of the many patriarchs and prophets and righteous men who taught and did many noble things, either praise or choose the state of virginity?' He answers: 'Because it was reserved for the Lord alone to be the first to teach this doctrine; for it was fitting that He who is arch-priest, arch-prophet and arch-angel should also be arch-virgin.'

¹². Ibid. 3,4 (SC 95,96). Cf. J. Montserrat-Torrents, 'Methodius of Olympus, *Symposium* III, 48: An Interpretation', *Studia Patristica* XIII, part II (Berlin, 1975), 239-243. The parallel between the virginity of Christ and Adam is common in patristic literature, see further P. Bratsiotis, 'Adam', *Religious and Ethical Encyclopedia*, vol.1 (Athens, 1962), 371-372.

bride that the Song of Songs and the forty-fourth Psalm speak of.¹³ For Methodius on another level this bride is the Church; then the perfect Christians; and lastly, in a special way, the consecrated virgin. Whereas the Virgin Mary is mentioned only once by Methodius, Christ is always in the centre, and is also the very archetype of purity (ἀγνεία).¹⁴

In the same way for Basil of Ancara virginity is imitation of Christ. Christ, although he kept the law, denied marriage for himself. In chapter 54 of his *On the True Purity of Virgins* Basil applies the classical typology Adam-Christ to the antithesis between marriage and virginity: As Adam was the seed of the present life by the pleasure of marriage, so Christ has become the seed of the future world by the incorruptibility that is inherent to virginity.¹⁵

Early Christians placed heavy stress on the fact that the flesh of Christ was utterly continuous with human flesh. Christ's flesh had been human flesh reformed in the strict sense. The flaws that rendered the body so difficult to control in ordinary men and women, before the glory of the Resurrection, were already absent in the virgin body of Christ. The virgins of the Church bore bodies analogous to that of Christ. Unshaken by intercourse their bodies had the marks of sex without their dire constraint. For just as it had been read back into the story of the Creation, it was implicit also in that of the Incarnation of Christ. The latter implied his freedom from the taint of the fall. He must therefore be a virgin himself, so as to lead Adam, the first man, out of hell, and his mother -for he can have no wife- must be equally free of all possibility of sexual impurity, that is, must be a perpetual virgin.¹⁶ Christ himself, being virginal, could put an end to the constant succession of corruption and death.¹⁷ Man's salvation could be brought about only by a reversal of the circumstances of the fall, that is by an absence of sexuality, and specifically by the virginity of Christ and Mary.¹⁸

¹³. Methodius, *Symposium* 7,8 (SC 95,194).

¹⁴. Cf. T. Camelot, 'Les traités De virginitate au IV siècle', op.cit. 286.

¹⁵. Basil of Ancara, *On the True Purity of Virgins*, 54 (PG 30,776-777).

¹⁶. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 14,1,16-18 (GNO VIII,I, 306,13-15).

¹⁷. A. Cameron, 'Virginity as a metaphor', op.cit. 190.

¹⁸. The connection is already there in Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3,22 (SC 211,439,57-445,92); 5,19 (SC 153,249,1-253,42). Cf. H. Koch, *Virgo Eva, Virgo Maria. Neue Untersuchungen über die Lehre von der Jüngfrauschaft und der Ehe Mariens in der ältesten Kirche* (Berlin, 1937) and E. Giannarelli *La tipologia femminile nella biografia e nell' autobiografia cristiana del IV secolo* (Rome, 1980), 32f.

The Cappadocian Fathers affirm that Jesus Christ took a human nature common to both women and men. He saved all humanity by taking on human nature. He was truly consubstantial to women and men in their humanity, and to God in his divinity. Cappadocian Christology maintains that the sex of Jesus was not insignificant or simply biological. The Logos took on a human sexuality, a way of being human, a masculine mode, and he bore this relationship to the Church. Christ, being fully human, had to bear within Himself one type of sexuality, either masculine or feminine in order to be like other human beings. He had to assume sexuality as well as every other human quality or he would not have been the God-human who saves us. But, sexuality is used in this context by the Cappadocians not in the sense of sexual activity. For them, Christ had no sexual activity in his life, but he did have a sexuality, a sexual orientation, which was masculine.¹⁹ Thus, for the Cappadocians, Christ Himself was not of an androgynous character.²⁰ He was a man. However, His manhood is to be understood in the context of His hypostatic identity as Son of God, as well as against the fact that He assumed human nature as such. The possibility for Christ to marry and have children is excluded by the Cappadocians. For them, sonship and not fatherhood is the exclusive divine hypostatic characteristic of Christ's personal identity. It is precisely because Christ was neither husband, nor father that one can better seize the whole dimension of the idea of a marriage between Christ and humanity.²¹

The Cappadocians maintain this idea of virginity as a spiritual marriage to the virgin Christ.²² The theme is common in the early Christian literature. For the ascetical literature of the second and third centuries, such as the Apocryphal Acts and the Pseudo-Clementine Epistles, keeping the body pure appears as a condition both necessary and sufficient for a spiritual marriage to Christ. Those in the second century who embraced Paul's stress on bodily holiness²³ and its link to union with

19. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.45,13* (PG 36,641) where Christ is the perfect male. Some modern Feminists have at times regarded Christ's virginal life as asexual (beyond gender). However, sexuality is present in Christ in a pure masculine form.

20. Speculations about an androgynous character of Christ were never widely accepted in the Early Church and they were limited to Gnostic circles. Christ's maleness was emphasized by the quotation of *Isaiah 7,14*, a famous messianic text always applied to Christ.

21. Cf. J. Meyendorff, 'Christ's Humanity: The Paschal Mystery', *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 31 (1987), 36.

22. Cf. M. Aubineau, SC 119, 193-204. Cf. D. Tsamis, *The Dialectical Character of the Teaching of Gregory the Theologian*, 55-56.

23. *Col.2,12; Rom.12,13; 1Cor. 6,13.*

Christ developed the notion that the virgin Christ offered each human being a nuptial union that excluded as bigamous a union to a human spouse. The virgin is the bride, espoused to Christ. The language of the *Song of Songs*, which had been applied by Origen to the relation of Christ with the soul of every person, male and female, came in the course of the fourth century to refer to the body of the virgin. As presented by the Cappadocians the language of the *Song of Songs* spelled out the theme of loyalty and of intimate protection. Espousal to Christ kept the virgin sacred and unavailable to any other marriage partner. No physical husband might be forced upon her by her family. This was why Basil of Caesarea decided that, while virgins of the church who had 'fallen' had formerly been subjected to the penance only of fornicators, they should now undergo the heavier penance associated with adulterers.²⁴ Thus, Christ is the Son, who, though virgin, became the Bridegroom and the Husband.²⁵

The Cappadocians receive and develop further the correspondence of Methodius between the first Adam and Christ the second Adam: 'The first time, [God the Logos] took dust from the earth and formed humanity; this time, he took dust from virginity and did not merely form humanity, but formed humanity around himself. The first time, he created; this time, he was created. The first time, the Logos made the flesh; this time, the Logos was made flesh, so that he might change our flesh to spirit, by being made partaker with us in flesh and blood. Of this new order in Christ, therefore, which he himself began, he is called the firstborn.'²⁶ Virginity and freedom from passion effect in the soul a close resemblance to Christ. Thus, virginity has a strong christological aspect. The Cappadocians apply the classical

²⁴. Basil of Caesarea, *Letter 199,18* (R.Deferrari iii, 104-108). Cf.P.Labriolle, 'Le "Mariage Spirituel" dans l'antiquité Chrétienne', *Revue Historique* 137 (1921), 204-225. It has been claimed that there is also a possible connection of this idea of virginity as a spiritual marriage to Christ with the virgin priestesses in the Greek world. Cf.T.Zeses, *Marriage and Celibacy in the Patristic Works on Virginity*, 133-134. The virgin priestess were conducting a holy marriage with the God they were serving. A special relationship of love existed between them and their God, that excluded the intercourse with men. Pythia, Apollo's female prophet was keeping her body pure in order to become divinised, to receive the divine energy and to foretell the future. The holy marriage between the virgin and God was a manifestation of love of the human marriage. However, the source of the Cappadocian thought is not found in these sources. The idea of the marriage between Christ and humanity was foreshadowed in the *Song of Songs*, the New Testament idea of Christ as Bridegroom, of the Kingdom of God as a wedding feast, and of Christ's union with the Church as reflected in human marriage.

²⁵. Cf.C.Christakis, 'Macrina and Gorgonia: Two Mothers of the Orthodox Church', 28.

²⁶. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, 3,2,54 (GNO II, 70,775). Cf.Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.38,13* (SC 358, 130-134); Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*, 9,23 (SC 17, 147-148). For a fuller examination of the parallel between the first Adam and the second Adam in this respect see C.Scouteris, *Consequences of the Fall and the Laver of Regeneration*, 85f.

typology Adam-Christ to the antithesis between marriage and virginity. As Adam was the seed of the present life by the pleasure of marriage, so Christ has become the seed of the future world by the incorruptibility that is inherent in virginity. Christ came into the world as through a virgin and he abolished the laws of the flesh. Before virginity was seen only as a shadow, now in Christ it is seen clearly.²⁷

However, it seems that in Nyssa's soteriology of virginity the christological element of virginity is not stressed as much as the mystical element. According to him virginity is closely connected with man's salvation,²⁸ since on the one hand, it brings God down to a sharing in human life and on the other, it lifts man up to a desire of heavenly things, becoming a kind of binding force in man's affinity to God. One would have expected, after such an outline of the salvific power of virginity, a balanced expression of both elements: of the salvation achieved objectively (for all) in Christ, and of the each one's personal (subjective) participation on it. Methodius of Olympus followed such a path. In him virginity is founded christologically and ecclesiologically. Christ is the Archvirgin and virginity is the imitation of Christ's life on earth and a spiritual marriage each soul has with Christ, according to the prototype of the Church's bond with Christ. But Gregory of Nyssa gives sometimes the impression that he supports an independent so to say character to virginity, where the christological element of virginity is not stressed as much as the mystical element, that is the participation of the human soul in the divine being.²⁹ W.Völker's view³⁰ that Gregory of Nyssa follows Methodius christological emphasis and that he develops it, does not seem to be right.³¹

In both Methodius and Gregory there is a correspondence between anthropology and soteriology that makes their ideas different. In Methodius, Adam in paradise was between corruptibility and incorruptibility (ἀφθαρσία), but he could not remain in incorruptibility. 'Αφθαρσία for the first time is maintained in Second Adam, Christ, by a new mixture (φύραμα) coming from a virgin woman and the Holy Spirit. Since Christ did not get married, but remained virgin, virginity is the

27. Cf. G. Mantzarides, 'Marriage and Virginity in the Church', 265; M. Aubineau, SC 119, 163-165.

28. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 2,3 (GNO, VIII, I, 255,7).

29. The ecclesiology of virginity is not stressed either in Nyssa and the Cappadocians in contrast with Augustine's thought. Cf. M. Aubineau, SC 119, 210f; P. Rousseau, *op.cit.* 8.

30. W. Völker, 'Virginität und Apathie als Höhepunkte asketischen Strebens bei Gregor von Nyssa', 301.

31. Cf. T. Zeses, *Marriage and Celibacy in the Patristic Works on Virginity*, 94.

only way of imitating Christ, the Archvirgin, and following the mother Church whose maternity is spiritual. Gregory on the other hand, seeing the life in paradise in an idealistic way, maintains that Adam had the ἀφθαρσία and the 'likeness' fulfilled, but he darkened the image and lost the ἀφθαρσία by the sin.³² What is stressed here is the return to paradise. Man's role is to clean the image and achieve the first beauty. The salvific role of Christ as the Archvirgin is not expanded by Gregory of Nyssa in his *On Virginity* and the word Archvirgin that W.Völker mentions does not exist in that work. The same can be remarked for Basil of Caesarea. Basil does not develop extensively in his work the connection between the notion of virginity and the person of Christ.

In only one place in Nyssa's *On Virginity*, is virginity connected with the economy of Christ. Virginity was given to help the defeated man to move upwards through purity. It is for this reason that Christ did not come into the world through marriage. 'He wanted to demonstrate through the manner of his becoming man this great mystery, that purity alone is insufficient for receiving the presence and entrance of God, a purity that cannot be otherwise achieved fully, unless one alienates himself entirely from the passions of the flesh.'³³ For what happened corporeally in Virgin Mary, when the fullness of the divinity shone forth in Christ through her virginity, takes place also in every soul that keeps virginity: Christ dwells with us spiritually and the Father along with Him.³⁴ Christ himself, being similarly virginal could put an end to the constant succession of corruption and death, everlasting so long as marriage continued.³⁵

However, in other places, when Nyssa speaks about freedom from passion and purity, then the connection with the person of Christ is evident. In a passage from the treatise *On Perfection*, Nyssa uses receptacle imagery to clarify what he means by human participation in the divine. For Nyssa all human virtues are really participations in the divine life and activity. That is, our passionlessness is actually Christ present in us as passionless: 'What is free from every passionate inclination looks to the source of passionlessness, who is Christ. Drawing from him, as from a

³². Gregory of Nyssa, *Song of Songs*, 2 (GNO VI, 54,5-9).

³³. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 2,2 (GNO VIII,I, 254,19-24). Cf.H.Knackstedt, op.cit. 26-27.

³⁴. Cf.Jn.14,23; T.Camelot, 'Les Traites de Virginité au IV siècle', 288-289.

³⁵. A.Cameron, 'Virginity as a Metaphor', 190. Cf.M.Azkoul, *St.Gregory of Nyssa and the Tradition of the Fathers* (New York, 1995), 118.

pure and incorruptible spring, a person will show in his thoughts such a likeness to the Prototype as exists between the water in the gushing spring and the water taken from there in a jar. For the purity in Christ and the purity seen in the person who participates in him are one in nature, though one is the flowing spring and the other draws from it.³⁶ Moreover, in other works Gregory of Nyssa develops an extended christology and soteriology, but not exclusively supporting through them virginity, but in order to clarify generally the mystery of the union of Christ with the Church and with each soul individually. The human soul darkened by sin was taken by Christ and brought to her primal beauty. He came to the world to change the darkened into lightened. Through baptism He cleans sin. Through Christ the human nature is cleansed from all passions and is becoming a clear image of the primal beauty.³⁷

Gregory Nazianzen in opposition to Nyssa and Basil of Caesarea stresses more the role of Christ as the Archvirgin and in this sense follows more clearly Methodius' and Basil of Ancara's pattern.³⁸ Mary's motherhood is the pivot of the Church's teaching about Christ and salvation. Virginity is imitation of Christ. 'Παρθενίη...Χριστοῦ λάχος'.³⁹ For Nazianzen, 'A great thing is virginity, and celibacy, and being ranked with the angels, and with the single nature; for I shrink from calling it Christ's'. Christ enacted the law of virginity 'to lead us away from this life, and cut short the power of the world, or rather, to transmit one world to another, the present to the future'.⁴⁰ Nazianzen stresses that Christ paid great honour to virginity by his personal example: 'Μέγα παρθενία, καί ἄζυγία, καί τό μετ' ἀγγέλων τετάχθαι, καί τῆς μοναδικῆς φύσεως ὁκνῶ γάρ εἰπεῖν Χριστοῦ'.⁴¹

For Nazianzen, by the salvific work of Christ a new way of life appeared. According to this, the goods of this world have no value. Man is called to imitate

³⁶. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Perfection* (GNO VIII,1, 4-1212). Cf.V.Harrison, 'Word as icon in Greek patristic theology', *Sobornost* 10,1 (1988), 41.

³⁷. Gregory of Nyssa, *Song of Songs*, 1,1 (GNO VI,15,2-11); 2 (GNO VI,46,10-47,1).

³⁸. G.Söll, *op.cit.* 288-319.

³⁹. Gregory Nazianzen, *In Laudem Virginitatis*, 12 (PG 37,523) and 197 (PG 37,537).

⁴⁰. Nazianzen's idea influenced later John Damascenus and Gregory Palamas in the East. Cf. John Damascenus, *Ἐκθεσις Ὁρθοδόξου πίστεως* 4,24: Αὐτός ὁ Χριστός τῆς παρθενίας τό κλέος οὐ μόνον ἐκ πατρός ἀρρεύστως καί ἀσυνδυάστως γεγεννημένος, ἀλλ' ὅτι καί ἄνθρωπος καθ' ἡμᾶς γενόμενος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἐκ παρθένου συναφείας ἄνευ σεσαρκωμένος, καί αὐτός παρθενίαν τήν ἀληθῆ καί παντελῆ δεικνύς ἐν ἑαυτῷ; Gregory Palamas, *Πρὸς Ξένην μοναχήν*, *Philocalia*, v.4 (Athens, 1957), 120.

⁴¹. Cf. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 43,62 (SC 384,258).

Christ, who is new Creation. Christ puts man back to the state he enjoyed before sin came into the world.⁴² Now there is a new way of life, above the human passions, free of sin, pain and slavery to the earthly king, the devil. Marriage serves the world of death, virginity serves the world of incorruptibility. Before, virginity was seen only as a shadow, now in Christ it is seen clearly. Christ came into the world as a virgin and he abolished the laws of the flesh. Procreation gave way to virginity once the Messiah had arrived.⁴³

For the Cappadocians the human sexual feeling was in contrast to Christ's untouched body. Human bodies could be redeemed only by a body whose virgin birth had been exempt from sexual desire. The baptized Christian would come to share in the tranquillity of the spotless flesh of Christ. Compared with the untouched body of the Lord, every human body bore the scar of sexuality. Christ brought with him virginity as a sign of the triumph of the spirit to the flesh to restore the paradisiac condition.⁴⁴ In this exposition of Christ's virginity the Cappadocians express no revulsion for the flesh. The loathing for the flesh was not the basis for advocating virginity for them. The absence of sexual desire in Christ's own human flesh was not simply a prodigy, incapable of imitation by others. Rather, Christ's unstirred body acted as a bridge between the present fallen state of the human body and its future glorious transformation at the Resurrection. Christ's body 'unscarred' sexual impulses stood for human flesh as it should be, flesh mysteriously 'remade for the better' through baptism and continence, flesh that would eventually be restored to its fully integrity at the Resurrection. Thus, virginity among humans is established in the virginity of Christ. In union with Christ, virginity is made the supra-natural (above nature, not against nature) way to salvation as deification.⁴⁵

If the virginity of Christ was not heavily stressed by all the Cappadocians, this was not the case with the virginity of His Mother as will be examined in the next chapter. The person of the Virgin Mary plays a central role in the Cappadocian soteriology and specifically in the Cappadocian teaching on virginity.

⁴². Gregory Nazianzen, *In Laudem Virginitatis*, 128-171 (PG 37,532-535). Cf.E.Bellini, *op.cit.* 459; 465-466.

⁴³. This idea also survived in modern Orthodox theology. Cf.P.Evdokimov, *Woman and the Salvation of the World*, 127.

⁴⁴. F.Bourassa, 'La Virginité dans l'état innocence', 253; *idem*, 'Excellence de la Virginité', 38f.

⁴⁵. K.Wesche, 'Man and Woman in Orthodox Tradition: The Mystery of Gender', *St.Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 37 (1993), 250; C.Paraskevaidis, *op.cit.* 105.

D .

THE VIRGIN MARY

The Lukan story of the Annunciation and birth of Christ was perpetuated in two different kinds of Christian literature: apocryphal stories and patristic expositions. For Ignatius of Antioch the birth from the Virgin Mary was a guarantee of Christ's true humanity.¹ But it was more: 'Hidden from the prince of this world were the virginity of Mary and her childbearing and likewise also the death of the Lord.'² Here, the function of the miraculous conception and birth of Christ was to show that 'our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived in the womb of Mary according to a dispensation, of the seed of David, but also of the Holy Spirit'.³ The intent of this doctrine was clearly christological. Justin the Martyr sets out the theological arguments that become the foundation and justification for the Church to praise the Virgin Mary. He calls her virgin, she is the new Eve, rectifying by her obedience the gap caused by Eve's disobedience.⁴ Irenaeus of Lyons echoes the second Eve theme⁵ and Clement of Alexandria agrees that Mary was a virgin *in partu*.⁶ For Origen Mary is 'the first fruit of virginity'.⁷ In Athanasius the virgin birth is explained on the traditional anti-docetic way, but it is also used in opposition to the Arians, to be a sign of Christ's true divinity. The traditional scriptural evidence is turned in this direction.⁸ John Chrysostom clearly teaches the perpetual virginity of Mary: 'We are

¹. Ignatius of Antioch, *Eph.* 7,2 (SC 95,74-76); *Trall.* 9,1 (SC 95,118); *Smyrn.* 1,1 (SC 95,154).

². Ignatius of Antioch, *Eph.* 19,1 (SC 95, 58).

³. Ignatius of Antioch, *Eph.* 18,2 (SC 95,86).

⁴. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 66 (BEΠΕΣ 3,271); *Apology*, 1,33 (BEΠΕΣ 3,178-179).

⁵. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, 5,19 (SC 153,249,1-253,42).

⁶. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, 7,16 (BEΠΕΣ 8,291). Cf. J. Broudéhoux, op.cit. 104 for Clement's view on the virginity of Mary.

⁷. Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, 10,17 (SC 162,214-216). Cf. H. Campenhausen, *The Virgin Birth in the Theology of the Ancient Church* (London, 1964), 57-63. For Origen's view see H. Crouzel, 'La Théologie mariale d'Origène,' SC 87 (Paris, 1952), 11-63; I. Golden, 'Origen and Mariology', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 36, n.2 1991, 141-153.

⁸. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, chapters 33-40.

ignorant of many things, as for instance, how the Infinite is in a womb, how He that contains all things is carried, as unborn, by a woman; how the Virgin gives birth and continues a Virgin' (τίκτει ἡ παρθένος καὶ μένει παρθένος).⁹ The virgin birth of Christ shows the new situation in which death is defeated absolutely.¹⁰ Jerome engaged in polemics over the details of Mary's virginity and he makes explicit the connection between this topic and the theme of virginity in general.¹¹

However, it has been claimed that 'Mary plays a noticeably small part in the ascetic literature of the third and even the fourth century'.¹² Even Methodius of Olympus with all his excessive praise of virginity, makes virtually no use of the Virgin Mary. Only once, in the great closing hymn of the *Symposium*, is the Virgin mentioned last of all beside other examples of virginity like Abel, Joseph, Jephthah's daughter, Judith, and Susanna.¹³

The Cappadocian Fathers did not write a great deal about the Virgin Mary, but their writings significantly advanced her status.¹⁴ Their general teaching on virginity and its meaning are closely connected with the person of the Virgin Mary. When they speak of her, it is within the context of Biblical exegesis for theological proof against heresy. There is no any speculation by them from apocryphal texts. Jewish exegesis of the prophecy of Isaiah 7,14 claimed that the original Hebrew does not refer to the Virgin at all, neither to the Virgin Mary, nor to any other virgin, but simply to 'a young woman of marriageable age'.¹⁵ That issue was repeatedly brought home to the Cappadocians in their encounters with Judaism, with which they shared the 'divinely inspired Scriptures'.¹⁶ But the interpretation of those Scriptures by the Cappadocians was strongly Christological. The prophecy of Isaiah read in the Septuagint, and then

⁹ John Chrysostom, *Hom. 4 in Matthew 3* (PG 57,43). Cf. J. Quasten, *Patrology* v.III, op.cit. 476-477. Cf. R. Dieu, 'La mariologie de S. Jean Chrysostome', *Mémoires et Rapports du Congrès Marial I* (Brussels, 1921), 71-83.

¹⁰ 'Ὡς περ ἄνευ συνουσίας ἐκεῖνος γεγένηται ἐκ Πνεύματος ἁγίου οὕτω καὶ ἡμεῖς γεννώμεθα ἐν τῷ λουτρῷ ... Ἐπλάσθη Ἀδάμ, ἐτέχθη Χριστός ἐκ τῆς πλευρᾶς τοῦ Ἀδάμ εἰσῆλθε φθορά, ἐκ τῆς πλευρᾶς τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐπήγαγεν ἡ ζωή.' John Chrysostom, *Hom. in Ephesians*, 20,3 (PG 62,139). Cf. T. Zeses, *Man and World in the economy of God according to John Chrysostom*, 147.

¹¹ Cf. J. Kelly, *Jerome*, 180-186; A. Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of the Empire*, 174.

¹² H. Campenhausen, op.cit. 48.

¹³ Methodius of Olympus, *Symposium*, 11,290 (SC 95,318). For a more detailed account see H. Campenhausen, op.cit.; L. Legrand, op.cit. 121-124; J. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London, 1985), 490-499.

¹⁴ Cf. G. Soll, op.cit.; S. Fedyniak, *Mariologia apud PP. Capadoces* (Rome, 1958).

¹⁵ Athanasius, *Epistle against the Arians*, 1,54 (PG 26,125).

¹⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration*, 4,1 (PG 45,20B).

in the New Testament¹⁷ 'Behold, the virgin will conceive' (ἰδοὺ ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει) and was applied to the Virgin Mary by them. The concern of the Cappadocians when mentioning the Virgin Mary most often had to do with her physical state of virginity during every moment of her life -including pregnancy and childbirth.¹⁸ This focus not only helped them battle docetists and other heretics, it also proved critical in developing the Christological formulations about the divine and human natures at the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon.

Basil of Caesarea believed that the Virgin Mary was 'ever-virgin' and Theotokos.¹⁹ Basil says that the human nature of Christ is necessary for the salvation of man. So, he defends the fullness and reality of the human nature of Christ presenting Jesus Christ who was born of the Virgin Mary.²⁰ Arians such as Eudoxius and Eunomius disapproved of the perpetual virginity all along. It is not true that Basil of Caesarea discusses cautiously the virginity of Mary. According to H.Campenhansen, Basil was concerned, as always, to avoid any unnecessary hostilities between rival parties and he emphasized that the acceptance of Mary's perpetual virginity is not really necessary. According to this a dogmatic judgment that simply maintained her virginity up to the birth of Jesus would have been adequate for Basil, and 'thanks to the positive testimony in Matthew this fact remains all along beyond discussion'.²¹ This interpretation of Basil's thought seems very narrow and is contradicted by Basil's affirmation that the assertion that the Mother of God ever ceased to be a virgin could not be tolerated by devout Christians.²²

Gregory Nazianzen has few references to the Virgin Mary, but he does call her 'undefiled' (ἄχραντος), Theotokos and he believes she was virgin.²³ Mary's

¹⁷. Mt. 1,23.

¹⁸. Cf.G.Söll, op.cit. 288-303; 426-440.

¹⁹. Basil of Caesarea, *Homily VIII in Hexaemeron* (PG 29,180). Cf.O.Papadopoulou-Tsanana, op.cit. 91.

²⁰. See, Basil of Caesarea, *To the holy nativity of Christ*, 3-6 (PG 31,1464A-1473D).

²¹. H.Campenhansen, op.cit. 65.

²². Basil of Caesarea, *To the holy nativity of Christ*, 5 (PG 31,1468B): 'ἡμεῖς δέ, εἰ καὶ μηδὲν τῷ τῆς εὐσεβείας παραλυμαίνεται λόγῳ (μέχρι γάρ τῆς κατὰ τὴν οἰκονομίαν ὑπηρεσίας ἀναγκαία ἡ παρθενία, τό δ' ἐφεξῆς ἀπολυπραγμόνητο τῷ λόγῳ τοῦ μυστηρίου), ὅμως διὰ τό μή καταδέχεσθαι τῶν φιλοχρίστων τὴν ἀκοήν, ὅτι ποτέ ἐπαύσατο εἶναι παρθενος ἡ θεοτόκος, ἐκείνας ἡγούμεθα τὰς μαρτυρίας αὐτάρκεις.'

²³. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.29,4* (SC 250,184); *Or.45,9* (PG 36,633): 'κυηθεὶς μὲν ἐκ τῆς Παρθένου, καὶ ψυχὴν καὶ σαρκα προκαθαρθείσης τῷ Πνεύματι (ἔδει γάρ, καὶ γεννησιν τιμηθῆναι, καὶ παρθενίαν προτιμηθῆναι)'. Cf.A.Theodorou, 'The teaching of Gregory Nazianzen on the human body', *Scientific Journal of the Department of Theology of the*

state of holiness was such that she could give birth not to the human child Jesus, but to the God-man. Nazianzen following the style of the veneration of saints certainly emphasizes Mary's purity and holiness and proves Söll's general opinion that 'it cannot be proved that the Cappadocians laid any special stress on the ethical valuation of the Mother of God' not entirely true.²⁴ The virginity of Mary does not contradict the term Theotokos. The term Theotokos became through Nazianzen, long before the Council of Ephesus (431), the touchstone of orthodoxy. Nazianzen declares Mary's virginity and at the same time makes Mary the test of orthodox belief:

'If anyone should assert that He passed through the Virgin as through a channel, and was not at once divinely and humanly formed in her (divinely, because without the intervention of a man; humanly, because in accordance with the laws of gestation), he is in like manner godless. If any assert that the manhood was formed and afterward was clothed with the Godhead, he too is to be condemned. For this would not be a generation of God, but a shirking of generation. If any introduces the notion of two Sons, one of God the Father, the other of the mother, and discredits the unity and identity, may he lose his part in the adoption promised to those who believe aright ... If anyone assert that His flesh came down from heaven, that is not from hence, nor of us, but above us, let him be anathema ... If anyone has put his trust in Him as a man without a human mind, he is really deprived of mind, and quite unworthy of salvation. For that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved.'²⁵

Gregory of Nyssa elaborates on the 'second Eve' theme, and uses the title 'Theotokos'.²⁶ Eve's virginity was a condition she lost. With the Theotokos, virginity had returned to earth; ontologically virginity is ready to contain in its depths the One who cannot be contained. The dogma of perpetual virginity in, during, and after giving birth (*ante partum, in partu, et post partum*) states precisely this.²⁷

University of Athens 21 (Athens, 1974), 112; J.Aldama, 'La Tragedia "Christus Patiens" y la Doctrina Mariana en la Capadocia del siglo IV', J.Fontaine and C.Kannengiesser (eds.) *Epektasis: Melanges offerts au cardinal J.Daniélou*, (Paris,1972), 417-423; J.Quasten, *Patrology*, v.3, 253.

²⁴. G.Söll, *op.cit.* 434.

²⁵. Gregory Nazianzen, *Ep. 101,4-6* (PG 37,177). However, Nazianzen presents a difficult and strange text in the context of this discussion: '... but indeed he cried out and burst the virginal and maternal bonds with much power, and a male was brought forth by the prophetess, as Isaiah announces.' *Or.45,13* (PG 36,641A). The picture of Christ child exhibiting male power by bursting from his mother's womb is especially peculiar. It hardly seems compatible with the idea of Mary's virginity *in partu*. Cf.V.Harrison, 'Male and Female in Cappadocian Thought', 458.

²⁶. Gregory of Nyssa, *Letter 3* (GNO VIII,II, 25-26). Cf.F.Bourassa, 'Excellence de la Virginité', 32-33 and M.Gordillo, 'La virginidad trascendente de Maria madre de Dios, en S.Gregorio de Nisa y en la antigua tradición de la Iglesia', *Estudios Marianos* 21 (1960), 117-155.

²⁷. Cf.L.Mateo-Seco, 'La Mariologia en san Gregorio de Nisa', *Scripta Theologica* 10 (1978), 409-466, for a good study of Nyssa's Mariology. The Cappadocians do not elaborate on the idea that the term Theotokos entails the notion of virginity. However, by using the two terms (Theotokos and

Nyssa's difference from the other Cappadocians and his significance lies on the fact that he moves slightly away from the theme of Christ alone destroying death; Mary too defeats death by her virginity: 'If then death cannot pass beyond virginity, but finds his power checked and shattered there, it is demonstrated that virginity is a stronger thing than death. But those who by virginity have stopped this process [procreation] have drawn within themselves the boundary line of death, and by their own deed have checked his advance; they have made themselves in fact a frontier between life and death, and a barrier too, which stops him.'²⁸ And a few lines further he continues: 'Just in the case of Mary the Mother of God, death had ruled from Adam to her'²⁹, when it also approached her, it was crushed by striking against the fruit of her virginity as against rock.'³⁰ According to Nyssa, Mary's Son defeated death, and Mary herself, through her virginity, stopped the devastating cycle of birth and death. In this way Christ does not participate in the sequence of death that every man who is born naturally has. Christ is presented as the new creation. If Christ was born in a natural way, he would have carried himself as well the responsibility of death that accompanies every man. Mary by her virginity stopped the line of death that started from Adam up to her. Through her virginity, she receives the foretaste of immortality. However, all human beings according to Gregory, have this potential, if they practise virginity.³¹ Virginity maintained during childbirth is a sign of the victory already won over Death. It is a radiant prophecy inscribed in the body of Mary, and it announces the Resurrection. The Virgin is already to be immortal in the virgin birth.³²

Virgin) for the same person they show that these two terms in the person of the Virgin Mary do not contradict each other.

²⁸. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 14,1 (GNO VIII,I, 306,7-14).

²⁹. Rom.5,14.

³⁰. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 14,1 (GNO VIII,I, 306, 21-24). Cf.J.Kelly, op.cit. 495; M.Aubineau, SC 119, 435, n.6. Aubineau notes the connection with Isaiah 8,14-15. He also wonders if the phrase 'κατ'αυτήν' (GNO VIII,I, 306,23) refers to virginity in general or to the person of the Virgin Mary. Finally he prefers the second solution. However, it is unlikely that Nyssa had in mind the idea of the assumption of the Virgin Mary.

³¹. Cf.G.Ladner, 'The Philosophical Anthropology of Saint Gregory of Nyssa', 93. In this way Gregory gave theological justification for acknowledging Mary's power to the groups who were expressing their veneration and devotion to the Virgin Mary. These groups now had a theological *raison d'être*. Cf.V.Limberis, *Divine Heiress, The Virgin Mary and the Creation of Christian Constantinople* (New York, 1994), 104.

³². Cf.P.Evdokimov, *Woman and the Salvation of the World*, 253.

Nyssa implies the virginity of Mary using the method of allegory: 'You no doubt perceive the true food in the figure of the history. The bread which came down from heaven is not some incorporeal thing. For how could something incorporeal be nourishment to a body? Neither ploughing, nor sowing produced the body of this bread, but the earth which remained unchanged was found full of this divine food, of which the hungry partake. This miracle teaches in anticipation the mystery of the Virgin. This bread, then, that does not come from the earth is the Word.'³³ Thus, Nyssa sees in the manna another figure of the divine Word born of the Virgin.³⁴ Philo³⁵ and Origen³⁶ saw in the manna a figure of the Word. Irenaeus³⁷ saw the birth of Adam from the virgin earth as a figure of the virgin birth. 'It was not marriage which produced for him his "God-receiving" flesh, but he became the stonecutter of his own flesh, which was carved by the divine finger, for the Holy Spirit came upon the virgin and the power of the Most High overshadowed her.'³⁸ A.Malherbe and E.Ferguson have shown that here Nyssa modifies Luke 1,35 and that there is also an allusion to Daniel 2,34,45 which is also used by Nyssa³⁹ in reference to the virgin birth.⁴⁰ V.Harrison has shown that allegorical images of food and sexuality are closely tied in the Cappadocians.⁴¹ The above quoted text speaks of the incarnation and the eucharist. Christ is the true food of the soul. The fact that the manna is uncultivated is interpreted as a reference to the Virgin Mary, who conceives her Son without a man's seed. By implication, the ascetic, like Mary, is called to virginity so as to be united with God. This point is made explicit in *On Virginity*: 'What happened corporeally in the case of the immaculate Mary, when the fullness of the divinity shone forth in Christ through her virginity, takes place also in every soul spiritually giving birth to Christ, although the Lord no longer effects a bodily presence.'⁴² In this text Nyssa stresses that there is a spiritual incarnation of God in every virginal soul. Thus, Nyssa connects the virgin soul and the Virgin mother of God. God's

³³. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses* (GNO VII,I, 77,16-78,1) A.Malherbe & E.Ferguson, *The Classics of Western Spirituality*, Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses* (New York, 1978), 88.

³⁴. Ibid. 173-174, n.161.

³⁵. Philo, *Quod deterius pottori insidiari soleat* (Loeb ii, F.Golson-G.Whitaker (London, 1950), 281.

³⁶. Origen, *Hom. in Exodus* (SC 321,223-225).

³⁷. Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, 3,21,10 (SC 211,427-431).

³⁸. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses* (GNO VII,I, 108,22-109) A.Malherbe & E.Ferguson, op.cit. 110-111.

³⁹. Gregory of Nyssa, *In the baptism of Christ* (GNO IX, 232,5-9).

⁴⁰. A.Malherbe & E.Ferguson, op.cit. 184, n.290.

⁴¹. V.Harrison, 'Allegory and Asceticism in Gregory of Nyssa', *Semeia* 57 (1992), 118.

⁴². Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 2,2 (GNO VIII,I, 254,24-28).

kingdom comes as the soul shares as much as possible in the divine nature. Without losing its own nature it becomes godlike by a new kind of birth, whereby Christ is always mystically born as he makes it both virgin and mother, transcending male and female cooperation.⁴³ The perfect virginity and at the same time true maternity in Mary is one of the pairs of oxymora⁴⁴ which -despite the resemblance with the stoic fascination with paradox- are at the heart of the Christian doctrine and are used by the Cappadocians to stress the awareness of the antithesis and highlight its meaning.⁴⁵

Nyssa also appears to be the first to make the bush a figure of Mary's virginity unaffected by the birth of Christ: 'From this we learn also the mystery of the Virgin: The light of divinity which through birth shone from her into human life did not consume the burning bush, even as the flower of her virginity was not withered by giving birth.'⁴⁶ This allegorical image of Mary's virginity is unique for Nyssa and does not appear in Origen who is silent when he discusses the burning bush passage of Exodus 3,2-14.⁴⁷ This is an example that shows that Nyssa in his exposition of the ideal of virginity does not always follow his great master. Nyssa offers also an argument for the virgin birth in his sermon in the nativity of Christ.⁴⁸ Campenhausen believes that it can hardly be said that in this text Gregory is teaching

⁴³. Nyssa develops Origen's idea in this respect. Origen in a passage from his second homily on the Song of Songs, speaking of the words of the angel of the Annunciation, The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee, says: 'The birth of Christ began with this shadow; not only in Mary did his birth begin with this shadow, but in you too, if you are worthy, the word of God is born' [(*Hom.II,6* (SC 37,126)]. The connection between the virgin soul and the virgin Mother of God passed from Nyssa to Maximus the Confessor. Maximus articulates this idea at the beginning of his *epistle 19* (PG 91,592AB). That Christ makes the faithful and purified soul both virgin and mother is central in Maximus thought and teaching on deification and it is analysed in his exposition of the petition Thy Kingdom come. (PG 90,885B). Cf.A.Squire, 'The Idea of the Soul as Virgin and Mother in Maximus the Confessor', *Studia Patristica* III (Berlin, 1966), 456-461. Maximus developing Gregory of Nyssa's idea emphasizes the apostolic conviction that there is about every Christian soul at least one respect in which it is virginal, namely in its relationship to Christ and that relationship is orientated towards spiritual fruitfulness. John Chrysostom points out that when Paul speaks of espousing the Corinthians as a chaste virgin to Christ, he is addressing himself not merely to those whom he expects to be virgins in a physical manner, but rather to all who have that spiritual integrity of which physical virginity is only the sign and the shadow. Cf.A.Squire, *op.cit.*

⁴⁴. Other pairs of this kind were, flesh and spirit, transcendence and immanence, literalism and allegory. Cf.G.Kustas, 'St.Basil and the Rhetorical Tradition', *Basil of Caesarea, Christian, Humanist, Ascetic*, P.Fedwick (ed.) (Toronto, 1981), 268.

⁴⁵. J.Plagnieux, *op.cit.* 239.

⁴⁶. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, 2,21 (GNO II,162f). Cf.Gregory of Nyssa, *On the nativity of Christ* (PG 46,1136BC) for the burning bush as 'the mystery of the virgin'.

⁴⁷. Cf.A.Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 71-72; V.Harrison, 'Allegory and Asceticism in Gregory of Nyssa', 113-130.

⁴⁸. Gregory of Nyssa, *In the nativity of Christ* (PG 46,1140f). Cf.also J.Aldama, 'Natus ex Maria Virgine', *Gregorianum* 42 (1961), 37-62.

the *virginitas in partu*. However, in the sentence καὶ ἡ μετὰ τόκου παρθένος, ἡ ἄφθορος μήτηρ περιέπει τό ἔκγονον the predicate ἄφθορος can be interpreted physiologically, and thus the text supports the virgin birth.⁴⁹

In this context it is useful to consider another Cappadocian, Nyssa's friend, Amphilochius of Iconium (Gregory Nazianzen's cousin), who wrote a homily specifically for the feast of *Hypapante* which commemorated the purification of Mary and the presentation of Christ in the Temple.⁵⁰ Even though this feast is based on the New Testament account of the Presentation of the Lord, it appears that it became an occasion to celebrate three things: Mary's virginity; virginity as a choice for women; and finally the three legitimate states of womanhood, virginity, marriage, and widowhood. Amphilochius' oration lauds Mary's virginity and the wondrous way it bridged the gap between the divine and the human worlds. Mary's perpetual virginity gave the incarnate God immortal flesh. And because of Mary's virginity and its role in the economy of salvation, humanity has the opportunity to foretaste the sublime sweetness of immortality through virginity. As Amphilochius writes, virginity is the 'companion of the higher powers, and is the meeting place with incorporeal nature'.⁵¹ Women who choose to live the life of virginity no longer are under the command in Genesis 3,16, which states that women must bear children in pain and be subject to their husbands. 'Virginity is an unenslaved possession, a free dwelling-place, an ascetical training ornament, higher than human habits, and a release from the sufferings which occur daily from the mortal human condition.'⁵² Amphilochius also used the occasion of *Hypapante* to praise all the proper states of womanhood, extolling marriage and widowhood as well as virginity.⁵³

⁴⁹. Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Gregory the Wonder-Worker* (PG 46,909C-912C) gives evidence that personal devotion to Mary was growing in the third century. The life relates that Mary and John the Apostle appeared to Thaumaturgus one night in a dream. They were much larger than normal human beings. The dream shows that Nyssa knew of the Apocryphal traditions, but chose not to include them in his theological treatises and his teaching on the Virgin Mary.

⁵⁰. Nyssa also has a sermon written for this day: *In the Hypapante of the Lord* (PG 46,1151-1182).

⁵¹. Amphilochius of Iconium, Oration A, *In the Nativity of Christ* (PG 39,37): 'ὡς ἄνω δυνάμεων συνόμιλος, ὡς τῶν ἀσωμάτων φύσεων σύνδρομος.'

⁵². Ibid. 'ἡ παρθεनिया ὡς ἀδούλωτον κτῆμα, ὡς ἐλεύθερον ἐδιάτημα, ὡς ἀσκητικὸν ἐγκαλῶπισμα ὡς τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ἕξεως ἀνωτέρα, ὡς τῶν ἐπ' ἀνάγκαις παθῶν ἀπολυθεΐσα.'

⁵³. Ibid. 'καλὸν γὰρ τῶν τριῶν ταγμάτων ἀπομνημονεῦσαι.' Cf. I. Ortiz, 'Mariologia Amphilochii Iconiensis', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 23 (1957), 186-191.

A denial of the perpetual virginity generally appears as a theological absurdity and an impossibility in the Cappadocian theology. 'Only in the virgin birth of Christ had Mary recaptured Eve's first harmony. Overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, Mary had not felt any uncontrolled feeling at the moment when she conceived Christ. The physical sensation associated with the sexual act had been fully consonant, in her case.'⁵⁴ Her virginity was an image of a sacred boundary, unbreached by intrusion from the outside world. 'Christ's birth from Mary had been no anomaly, as when Athena had burst violently from the head of Zeus. In the conception, the birth, and the nurturing of Christ, every human physiological process had been respected, except for the acts of procreation and childbirth.'⁵⁵ Mary's virginity spoke of the resilience of a human body from which the disorder introduced into it by Adam's fall had been expunged.⁵⁶ If Eve's transgression is the expression of man's pride in which the natural order is overthrown, the Virgin's obedience is the expression of humility in which the natural order of communion is restored. Through her free, personal submission to the will of God the Divine Logos receives from her in her womb His human nature, so that from within the depths of the First Adam, from within the Holy Virgin, rises the Second Adam, the Divine Logos incarnate. Whereas Eve was created to be the Mother of all living, but gave herself to self-love and became the Mother of death, the Virgin Mother, by dying to self-love in her acceptance of virginity, has become the Mother of all living through her Son, Jesus Christ our God and Saviour.⁵⁷ In this context, virginity contains in itself the possibilities of death (with Eve) and life (with Mary) according to the response to the challenge, the one being given in pride for disobedience and death, the other in humility for obedience and redemption.⁵⁸ The elaboration by the Cappadocians of the contrast between the two virgins, Eve and Mary, is of profound soteriological significance and illustrates Virgin Mary's role in the history of salvation. This contrast symbolizes two possible uses of created freedom by man: in the first, a

⁵⁴. Cf.P.Brown, *The Body and Society*, 407.

⁵⁵. Ibid. 444.

⁵⁶. F.Bourassa, 'Excellence de la Virginité', 32-33.

⁵⁷. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of Man*, 20,4. Cf.J.Bastero, op.cit. 267-268.

⁵⁸. Cf.Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 5,19,1 (SC 153,248-251): 'Thus the knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience. For what Eve the virgin tied by incredulity Mary the virgin untied by faith'. Irenaeus developed especially this idea. Eve is also Mary 'who brought us not only the example of virginity, but God.

surrender to the devil's offer of false deification; in the second, humble acceptance of the will of God.⁵⁹

By intervening in the circle of pleasure and pain God in His compassion redirected pleasure towards the goal of the reproduction of the human race, and thus limited it and tamed it. After the Fall God in an act of compassion moderated the pain which is created by corruption and death, since the bearing of children is the greatest consolation in the face of death.⁶⁰ But, so that pleasure and pain could be destroyed in their entirety by the birth of Christ, this took place not only without pleasure and pangs of childbirth, but with a radical renewal of the laws to which sin had subjected nature; for it took place through a conception 'without seed' and a birth 'without corruption', without the distraction of His mother's virginity.

Since Christ had a generation, an entry into life, which was radically different from the familiar biological generation which we call birth, He was of course free from all postlapsarian biological laws and certainly also from death. When He accepted them voluntarily, together with His actual birth -which was nevertheless free and outside the postlapsarian law of generation- He did this in order to destroy them. The generation from Adam in pleasure, whereby the human race increases and multiplies, ruled tyrannically over nature, providing it with the food of death which it deserved.

The virgin birth of Christ which was the result of His compassion for men, brought about the destruction of both, namely, of the pleasure that derives from Adam and of the death that has come through Adam, wiping out the penalty imposed on Adam together with the sin committed by him. In this way the vicious circle of pleasure and pain was broken and human nature was liberated. With this new method of His generation (virginity) Christ not only brought human nature back to its prelapsarian state, but also rendered it complete. Adam's goal was to 'shake off' the division into male and female from the whole of nature through a relationship with divine virtue utterly free from passion. This was brought to pass by Christ: He realized and manifested the true essence of human nature, free from the characteristics of male and female, at its deepest and most unified level, which is common to both

59. This notion influenced significantly the Eastern Fathers after the Cappadocians and survived in modern Orthodox theologians. Cf. V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 137.

60. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 12 (GNO VIII, I, 302, 27).

sexes.⁶¹ Voluntarily accepting a virginal birth and submitting freely to the pain of death, Christ endows human nature with an incorruptible form of regeneration that is no longer contaminated by the pleasure of self-love which was the origin of man's fall and disintegration.

The Cappadocian teaching on the virgin birth of Christ and its implications are very important in the context of the Early Christian literature. If Christ was to be considered a member of the human race, it could not be possibly be a membership gained through the conventional sexual ways. Rather, he had to be the fruit of a virgin womb. In this way, he had recaptured the presexual majesty of Adam's first state. No joining of two bodies, no admixture of male seed had produced Adam (molded by God from the virgin, earth of Eden) or Eve (taken from Adam's side) or Christ (from the flesh of the virgin entirely within the womb of Mary, without the intervention of male seed).⁶²

Cappadocian theology is not in agreement with the view that human sexuality is intrinsically identical with sinfulness and the transmission of sinfulness is not justified in their teaching. The Cappadocians do not claim that it is because sexuality is evil that the Incarnation required a virgin birth. The negative aspects of sinfulness and fallenness are not attached to sexuality in an exclusive manner.⁶³ Fallenness consists rather in the overall sinfulness of our existence in the fallen world. It is associated with all our passions. Whether it be the need for food, for power, for security, or for sexual fulfillment, they all have in common a limitation of freedom, originally given by God. Man depends upon such passions and passively is the victim of a determinism contrary to the will of God for creation. God wanted man to freely move towards Him and not passively withdraw within himself, becoming slave of earthly needs. In contrast Mary's motherhood was totally free, since nobody except her and the Persons of the Trinity, were involved in it. It was indeed, her personal freedom with which she said yes to God. This is what is expressed in her virginity in her entire life and not only connected with the single event of the birth of

⁶¹ Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 7,23 (SC 405,240).

⁶² Cf. P. Brown, 'The notion of Virginity in the Early Church', 438. According to most physiological ideas current in Cappadocian times, the father's seed was the sole source of a child's life, while the mother only provided a receptacle in which he could grow. The teaching about the Virgin Mary turned this upside down agreeing with modern science, since the Virgin is the sole source of Christ's human life and she showed that every mother is also a true source of life for her child.

⁶³ This is stressed repeatedly in the Cappadocian system on virginity.

Christ.⁶⁴ In addition, the encounter between a free divine act and a free response of Mary resulted in the appearance of a new humanity, 'born not of blood nor of the will of man, but of God'.⁶⁵ Thus, for the Cappadocians freedom and newness required virgin birth. Nyssa adds that through virginity men as well as women are called to a spiritual motherhood, giving birth to Christ in imitation of the Theotokos.⁶⁶ One is called to become virgin through spiritual as well as bodily purity.

Furthermore and most significantly the Cappadocians also connect the virginal begetting of the Son with the virginal birthgiving of the Theotokos. They repeatedly stressed that the divine generation is unlike human fatherhood in that the Father does not implant his seed into another being in order to produce an offspring. It is unlike human motherhood in that he does not receive seed from another. Yet, like a human father, the God-Father is the source of the Son's life, and like a human mother he brings forth the Son from within himself. The Son's divine being comes entirely from him, without the collaboration of another parent.⁶⁷

It is evident that the closest human analogue to this mode of generation is actually the virginal birthgiving of the Theotokos. She brings forth the same Son in time, and his human nature comes entirely from her, without any contribution from a human father. In God the Father and in the Virgin Mother, each of whom brings forth the offspring alone, there is a wholeness, purity and integrity of parenthood.⁶⁸ The Cappadocian concept of virginity includes these characteristics of wholeness, purity and integrity along with the absence of sexual involvement. The fruit of such a mode of parenthood is also wholeness, the absolute completeness and perfection of Christ's divine nature and of his human nature, which originate in these two virginal generations.

Gregory Nazianzen refers to the parallel between Christ's two generations repeatedly. The Son is generated in eternity without a mother and in time without a

⁶⁴. Cf. J. Meyendorff, 'Christ's Humanity: The Paschal Mystery', 34.

⁶⁵. Jn. 1, 13,

⁶⁶. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 2, 2 (GNO VIII, I 254, 24-255, 3); *On the Song of Songs* (GNO VI, 19-23).

⁶⁷. See further in the previous chapter The Theology of Virginity.

⁶⁸. Cf. V. Harrison, 'The Fatherhood of God in Orthodox Theology', *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 37, 2&3 (1993), 203f.

father.⁶⁹ Gregory links the virginity of the Theotokos with the wholeness of her Son's humanity. '... but, emptying himself of his glory as the immortal God, the Father's motherless Son, he appeared for me himself, without a father, a strange son; yet no stranger, since from my own kind came this immortal, being made man by a virgin mother, so that the whole of him might save the whole of me.'⁷⁰ The Son's humanity came entirely from her, not from a human father. This occurred by the power of the Holy Spirit and of the Son himself: 'Neither by man's seed did he become man, but it was from that flesh which the Spirit had hallowed beforehand, of an unwedded, cherished mother that he came, a self-formed man ...'.⁷¹

Gregory Nazianzen stresses that both the divine generation and the Virgin's birth-giving are unlike the ordinary mode of human generation.⁷² God the Father is Father in the true sense since the Son comes entirely from him. He adds that the other human children are the offspring of a pair, so their generation involves division and incompleteness.⁷³ Again, there is an emphasis on wholeness. The usual human modes of fatherhood and motherhood that involve loss of virginity are contrasted with the divine fatherhood and its closest human likeness, the Theotokos' motherhood that are characterized by virginity.

This parallel between the Father and the Virgin, that was stressed by the Cappadocians, entered the Chalcedonian Definition. There, a single verb is used to name both the divine and human generations of Christ since in patristic Greek the same words γεννάω and γέννησις name the engendering of an offspring by either a male or a female parent. The definition says that Christ is generated before the ages from the Father in his divinity and in the last days ... of Mary the Virgin Theotokos in his humanity.⁷⁴

The Cappadocians' Neo-Arian opponent Eunomius claimed that the Orthodox concept of divine generation involves dividing into two parts, an idea both sides in

⁶⁹. Gregory Nazianzen, 'Ἀπάτωρ ἐντεῦθεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀμήτωρ ἐκεῖθεν' Or.29,19 (SC 250,218); Or.38,2 (SC 358,106).

⁷⁰. Gregory Nazianzen, *poem 1,1,9* (PG 37,459-460).

⁷¹. Ibid. (PG 37,462).

⁷². Gregory Nazianzen, Or.29,4-5 (SC 250,182-186).

⁷³. Ibid.

⁷⁴. The parallel between Christ's two generations is also described in many Byzantine liturgical hymns to the Mother of God. Cf.V.Harrison, 'The Fatherhood of God in Orthodox Theology', 207-208.

the debate would have considered unthinkable, since God is not for decomposition. Gregory of Nyssa, replied that such a division did not occur in Christ's divine generation since it did not occur in his human either. He compared God the Father and the Theotokos:

'How does he who says such things fail to understand that when appearing in the flesh God did not allow the passion of human nature in the constitution of his own body, but rather a Child was generated for us by the power of the Holy Spirit; and neither did the Virgin suffer passion, (καί παιδίον ἐγγενήθη ἡμῖν ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου δυνάμεως καί οὔτε ἡ παρθένος ἔπαθεν) nor was the Spirit diminished, nor was the power of the Most High divided up? For indeed the Spirit is whole and the power of the Most High remained undiminished, and the Child was generated whole and the mother's incorruption was not destroyed. For if flesh was generated from flesh without passion, will Eunomius not agree that the radiance of the glory is from the glory itself, since the glory is neither diminished, nor divided in generating the light? And as a human word is generated from the mind undividedly, cannot God the Word be generated from the Father without the Father's essence being divided?'⁷⁵

The wholeness of the Theotokos in her birthing is analogous to the incorruptible wholeness of the Father, the Spirit and the Son himself as they participate in the process of Christ's human birth. Virginity is an expression of this wholeness, the freedom from division, instability and diminution. The Theotokos' unique way of giving birth is the form of human generation most like the divine generation itself.

The Cappadocian discussion about Christ's mother and Father brings in mind a modern explanation of the virgin birth.⁷⁶ According to this one factor in Incarnation, which required a virgin birth, is that it involved the coming into the world of a Person who already had an [eternal] Father. This interpretation claims that one would have to admit that the whole Gospel story would have changed its character, if Jesus had two fathers (Why not then a second divine mother?). Or if some humans were his brothers and sisters, directly and physically, which means that the brotherhood and sisterhood of the whole of humanity would be relegated to a 'spiritual' sense only. The Cappadocians do not spell out clearly such arguments, but their discussion and insistence on the one mother and one Father is not far from such an interpretation.

⁷⁵. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, 2 (GNO II, 335,12-26). Cf. also B.Pottier, op.cit. 288-297, who expands on the virginity of Theotokos focusing on *Against Eunomius* 3.

⁷⁶. J.Meyendorff, 'Christ's Humanity: The Paschal Mystery', 35.

Thus, for the Cappadocians, the virgin state is a form of 'mediation' between the divine and the human: 'For in the Virgin Birth, virginity has led God to partake in the life of human beings ... and in the state of virginity the human person has been given the wings with which to rise to a desire for the things of heaven. And so virginity has become the linking force that assures the intimacy of human beings with God; and by the mediation of the virgin state there comes about the harmonies joining of two beings of such widely distant natures.'⁷⁷

The relation between marriage and virginity in the Cappadocian thought will be examined in the next chapter in three stages: the association of marriage and death and the eschatological vision of virginity as the limit of death; the notions of immortality and incorruptibility as they relate to marriage and virginity; and the tension between the active and the contemplative lives in connection to marriage and virginity.

⁷⁷. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 2 (GNO VIII,I, 254,244-255,13).

CHAPTER FOUR

MARRIAGE AND VIRGINITY

A.

ABOLITION OF DEATH - THE ESCHATOLOGICAL VISION OF VIRGINITY

Throughout the early centuries the advocates of virginity remained indifferent to the charge that sexual renunciation threatened the continuance of the human race and was therefore contrary to the will of God.¹ The true Christian looked ahead to the end of this age, to the age to come, and considered procreation as a vain attempt to secure that everlasting continuity which assured only by the spiritual birth of baptism and preserved through the virgin state.²

Marriage is nearly exclusively linked with death in a number of texts that have originated in the encratite or gnosticizing milieu. In the writings of the Church Fathers, this negative view, though not completely abandoned, is counterbalanced by a more positive conception, in which immortality is linked with both marriage and virginity. However, the dominant idea is that virginity abolishes death, because unlike marriage, it does not feed death with children. In this way virginity shortens the present life and brings closer the future one. Thus, virginity is eschatologically motivated. It is a realized eschatology.³ In virginity, time, the process of genesis and corruption, seems to come to an end. Death is seen as the very cause of the existence of marriage. Marriage is a direct consequence of death. This is suggested in Lk.20,35

¹. Cf.R.Price, op.cit. 266. Price notes that Paul makes no mention of what for the Jew, Christian or pagan of his day would have appeared the main reason for marriage, the need to maintain the human race.

². Cf.P.Brown, *The Body and the Society*, 184-185, 298-299.

³. For a brief but good description of the Patristic Eschatology in general see G.Florovsky, 'Eschatology in the Patristic Age: An Introduction', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 2, n.1 (1956), 27-40; B.Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church* (Cambridge, 1991), 81-89.

and supported by Origen, Basil of Ancara⁴, John Chrysostom⁵ and Gregory of Nyssa who elaborates the fact that marriage sustains the power of death.

The connection of the virginal life with the expectation of the eschaton is made already by Paul⁶ and was popular in Gnostic circles.⁷ However, the motives are different. The Cappadocian motive is the desire for the shortening of the present life toward a quicker coming of the eschaton. The Gnostics' motive is hostility to the present world and its evil creator, whose sovereignty is served by the birth of children. According to the Cappadocians, death is a consequence of sin. Life in spirit and the mortification of sin abolishes its consequence, death. Virginity is considered not only as a spiritual means for the abolition of death, but also as a means towards its biological abolition. Corruption and death start already from birth. Those who do not serve marriage and procreation demolish the reign of death. Virginity is not a means of corruption and that is why the body that does not serve the life of corruption and the mortal succession is incorruptible.⁸

For Gregory of Nyssa, the '*sequence of dying*' (ἀκολουθία τοῦ ἀποθνήσκειν), that is the inherited death, started with the first man and ends with the life of the virgin one. Otherwise it is not possible to stop death, when, through marriage new births occur. Fire is extinguished when we do not feed her. In the same way, the power of death will cease when marriage will not provide material for death. What happened in the birth of Christ who was exempted from death, being born from the Virgin, the same happens in every virgin: Death, the master of all the previous generations finds in virginity, his limit that he cannot overcome.⁹

For Gregory Nazianzen also, virginity abolishes death, because unlike marriage, it does not feed death with children. In this way virginity shortens the

⁴. Basil of Ancara, *On the True Purity of Virgins*, 54 (PG 30,776-777).

⁵. John Chrysostom, *On Virginity*, 14,6 (SC 125,142). Cf. T.Zeses, *Marriage and Celibacy in the Patristic Works on Virginity*, 139f.

⁶. 1Cor. 7,29,31.

⁷. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, 3,3 (BEPES 8,15): Ὁ δὲ λόγος, μή βουλόμενοι τὸν κόσμον τὸν ὑπὸ τοῦ δημιουργοῦ γεγόμενον συμπληροῦν, ἀπέχεσθαι γάμου βούλονται.' Ibid. 3,6 (BEPES 8,26-27). 'Διδάσκουσι μὴ δεῖν παραδέχεσθαι γάμον καὶ παιδοποιίαν μηδὲ ἀντισταθῆναι τῷ κόσμῳ δυστυχῆσαντος ἑτέρους μηδὲ ἐπιχορηγεῖν τῷ θανάτῳ τροφήν.'

⁸. T.Zeses, *Marriage and Celibacy in the Patristic Works on Virginity*, 100.

⁹. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 14,1 (GNO VIII,I, 305,26-307,7).

present life and brings closer the future one¹⁰: '...enacted the law of virginity, to lead us away from this life, and cut short the power of the world, or rather, to transmit one world to another, the present to the future.'¹¹ The abolition of death makes the '*eschaton*' come closer, instead of keeping it away by the extension of the present life. The virgin does not put any period of time between him and the '*parousia of God*' by the creation of new lives. He completes in him the line of the present life and he lives in the atmosphere of the expectation of the epiphany of God, tasting already in this life the goods of the '*eschaton*'. Christ promised for the righteous an angelic life, a life of virginity. The virgin already received the promised good imitating by his pure life the purity of the bodiless powers.¹² Basil of Caesarea does not connect explicitly marriage and death as Nyssa and Nazianzen, although sometimes he implies it, especially when he sees marriage as a concession to human nature¹³ and when he shows his preference for virginity because of the proximity of the end of the world.¹⁴ However, there is not in Basil any detailed exposition of the eschatological role of virginity in the abolition of death.

For the two Gregories clearly bodily procreation produces mortal bodies. Virginity instead of children gives life and incorruptibility. Of course, by bearing children a woman is saved,¹⁵ having the fruits of the Holy Spirit. But, one can conceive in his heart by the Spirit and gives birth then to wisdom, righteousness, and holiness. Everybody can become mother of such children. Christ refers to the creation of such a new spiritual procreation when he says 'Whoever does what my Father in heaven wants him to do is my brother, my sister, and my mother.'¹⁶ This spiritual procreation was taught by the saints. Prophet Isaiah says that the fear of God was the reason of this spiritual conception¹⁷ and Paul claims that he has become the father of many children in Christ.¹⁸

¹⁰. Gregory Nazianzen, *In Laudem Virginitatis*, 172-214 (PG 37,535-538); *Exhortatio ad virgines*, 27-32 (PG 37,635A); *Comparatio Vitarum*, 16-26 (PG 37,650-651).

¹¹. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.43,62* (SC 384,258). Cf.T.Zeses, *Marriage and Celibacy in the Patristic Works on Virginity*, 200.

¹². Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 14,4 (GNO VIII,I, 308,20-309,19); *On the Song of Songs*, 5 (GNO VI, 132-135).

¹³. P.Humbertclaude, *op.cit.* 97.

¹⁴. S.Giet, *Les idées et l'action sociales de Saint Basile*, 43-47.

¹⁵. *1Tim.2,15*.

¹⁶. *Mt.12,50*. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 14,3 (GNO VIII,I, 30-8,18-19).

¹⁷. *Is.26,17-18*.

¹⁸. *1Cor. 4,15*.

Nyssa in chapter 14 of his *On Virginity* says that death will cease to exercise its power, if marriage no longer provides its victims by the engendering of people who are bound to die. For Nyssa, the engendering of people is for man more a principle of death than of life, for death starts at birth (*ἀπό γὰρ γενέσεως ἡ φθορά τὴν ἀρχὴν ἔχει*)¹⁹. Death is active as long as human begetting is carried on by marriage. Marriage is the instrument that keeps the power of death alive. Virginity is a way of overcoming death. Those who abstain from the propagation of mankind and practise virginity, have made themselves a borderland (*μεθόριον*)²⁰ that keeps death from leaping forward. Death finds in virginity its end and is dissolved. The body that does not consent to be the instrument of a mortal succession is free from corruption (*ἄφθορον*),²¹ because in it the continuous series of corruption and death (*τῆς τοῦ φθείρεσθαι καὶ ἀποθνήσκειν ἀκολουθίας*),²² which covers the period between the first man and him who practises virginity, is interrupted. Similarly, in every soul that transcends life in the flesh by virginity, the power of death is dissolved, not having where to put its sting. In the virgin the mortal element has been truly swallowed up by life.²³

Thus, virginity is an image of the blessedness in the world to come, in two ways. First, those who practise virginity, living for God, do not bring forth fruit for death. As they have put an end to life after the flesh, they henceforth wait for the Parousia not bringing about by intermediate generations any interval (*διάστημα*) between the Parousia and themselves. Marriage postpones the Parousia, whereas true virginity transcends time itself. Secondly, by their angelic life, which is the way of life after the resurrection, they have already received in the present life the promised goods. The first idea is a transformation of the Plotinian notion of the immediacy ('nothing between') of the union between lover and the beloved. The idea of 'being with' a superessential unity in an unconfused intimacy relates to Plotinus.²⁴

In his *On Virginity* Gregory of Nyssa reveals some aspects of marriage which seem to contrast with his views in his later work *On the Creation of Man*,

¹⁹. Ibid. 14,1 (GNO VIII,I, 306,2-3).

²⁰. Ibid. (GNO VIII,I, 306,5).

²¹. Ibid. (GNO VIII,I, 306,10).

²². Ibid. (GNO VIII,I, 306,13-14).

²³. Ibid. 14,4. (GNO VIII,I 308,21-22).

²⁴. Cf. K. Corrigan, 'Some notes towards a study of the "solitary" and the "dark" in Plotinus, Proclus, Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-Dionysius', paper read in the *Twelfth International Conference on Patristic Studies* (Oxford 21-26 August 1995).

where the function of marriage is more positive. In the first work, marriage as the institution of procreation is rather negatively seen as sustaining the power of death, and delaying the moment of Parousia. In order to emphasize the contrast between marriage and virginity, Gregory says that marriage gives nourishment to death. Virginity is the end not only of marriage, but also of death. This view can be misunderstood as reflecting a view of the Encratites and conflicting Gregory's positive statements in *On the Creation of Man*. The fact that this is a treatise on virginity and we should expect an unfavourable attitude towards marriage is not very satisfactory explanation. Neither is it enough to say that marriage and death are for Gregory ambiguous realities.²⁵ However, we should have in mind that this is a later work than the *On Virginity* and it is very possibly a substantial development in Gregory's ideas.

It is clear that Gregory of Nyssa thought of virginity as a victory over physical death. He opposes virginity to marriage which he considers an instrument of physical death. One who abstains from marriage does not any longer give fuel to death. But also for him time seems to come to an end. This may seem as if in Gregory's view, marriage delays the Parousia.²⁶ All this teaching makes him look in agreement with the theology of the Encratites. His difference though, with this theology, is that Gregory does not support a general prohibition of marriage, because creation after the fall has to be brought to its completion by the alternate way of marriage. He is not in favour of hastening the moment of Parousia and stopping the course of time by universally practised virginity, but for the individual virgin time becomes virtually non-existent because of his victory over death, and his anticipation of the life of the world to come. Virginity is chosen freely, its purpose is not to bring about the end of time and history. This is clear even in *On Virginity* where he dedicates a chapter (8) against those who reject marriage. What Gregory means is that for whoever abstains from procreation the temporal distance between himself and the end of time is taken away. However, for the virgin the eschatological expectation of the Parousia does not disappear completely.

The theology of the Encratites with its radical eschatologism distorted the original Pauline perspective²⁷ and it is in sharp contrast with the Cappadocian

²⁵. T.van Eijk, op.cit. 233.

²⁶. M.Aubineau, SC 119, 441, n.5: 'Le mariage ... retarderait l'heure de la Parousie'.

²⁷. *1Cor.7*.

exegesis. The Encratites claimed to have already received the resurrection. By general continence the power of death as the last enemy could be broken. For the Cappadocians, marriage, though affected by sin, also serves a positive purpose. The acceptance of marriage as the institution on which the human race relies for its survival and the world for its fulfillment, implies a positive view of time and the realm of Becoming.²⁸

Nyssa by exploring the theme of the spirit and the flesh, reveals what it ultimately means to live and to die:

"Well, then, just as what has been generated by the generation of the flesh holds in reserve with it also the potential of dissolving, so also the spirit holds in store for those who are generated through it the life-making power. So what emerges from what has been said? Upon standing back from the life according to the flesh, upon which death also definitely follows, seek a life which does not drag with it the sequence of death. This is the life of virginity. The truth of this will be more apparent by coming to agreement concerning things which seem trivial. For who does not know that the making of mortal bodies is the task of bodily union, while life and incorruptibility rather than babies accrue from the communion of the spirit for those united with it? It is well to cite the apostle on this: "She is saved by childbearing" the mother of such children who is made happy from this, as the Psalmist rejoicing spoke in divine hymns: "he who establishes the barren mother in a house, rejoicing over children." For how truly happy is the virgin mother who is pregnant with immortal children by the spirit, called barren by the prophet because of her moderation.'²⁹

Gregory of Nyssa reverses the meaning of these last texts which are in praise of the joys of earthly motherhood. However, he is not opposed to childbearing, but sees it as a necessary ministry. Nor is he really opposed to the joys of motherhood. The

²⁸. T.van Eijk (op.cit.) has shown Gregory of Nyssa's dependence on Plato concerning this idea. On the Platonic influence in Gregory of Nyssa in general see H.Cherniss, *The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa* (Berkeley, 1930) and J.Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique*. Cherniss finds in Gregory much that is Platonic, but thinks that Gregory has not improved Platonism by applying and adjusting its ideas to Christian problems. Daniélou, on the other hand, believes that Gregory's Platonism is no longer Platonic; there has been a complete metamorphosis of its traditional meaning. In a recent dissertation C.Apostolopoulos follows Cherniss line, (*Phaedo Christianus; Studien zur Verbindung und Abwägung des Verhältnisses zwischen den platonischen "Phaidon" und dem Dialog Gregors von Nyssa "Ueber die Seele und die Auferstehung"*, Diss. (Frankfurt am Main, 1986). It is difficult to determine how much of Plato Gregory knew. Cherniss concludes that 'Gregory knew Plato first hand and knew him exceedingly well. There seems to me no more conclusive proof possible of the contention that he was so well acquainted with the Platonic writings as to be able to refer to them from memory.' Cf.H.Cherniss, op.cit. 60-61. Cf. on this discussion A.Armstrong, 'Platonic Elements in St.Gregory of Nyssa's Doctrine of Man', 113-126; A.Meredith, 'The concept of mind in Gregory of Nyssa and the Neoplatonists', 35-51.

²⁹. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 13,3 (GNO VIII,I, 305,3-22).

problem with marriage is not its joys as such, but the inability of those who are married to accept these joys as impermanent and no ultimate source of satisfaction. As long as marriage is not one's means of immortality, the attachment and the need for security will not be present to distort the marriage relationship. We should examine more carefully what Nyssa means by 'having immortal children', being '*barren through moderation*' and indeed what he means by '*death*' and '*life*' as well.

Nyssa seems to deny the need for Christians to participate in childbearing altogether. That's why chapter 14 of his *On Virginity* has caused considerable difficulty for scholars in general. Its purpose is to explain a key point in Gregory's argument: how virginity overcomes 'the sovereignty of death' and restores us to our former condition.³⁰ It would seem that Nyssa is arguing here that virginity fixes a limit to death by no longer providing death with mortal human bodies upon which to feed. If we are to take him literally, the solution to the problem of death is to not conceive and bear children, in other words, the solution to death is the annihilation of the human race.³¹ In order to demonstrate his point, he revives an old argument which he had already used in chapter 3: there would be no widowhood or orphanhood without marriage.³² Marriage is like a sword which fits well in the palm, but is nonetheless an instrument of death. It presents the smooth surface of pleasure to the senses, but to anyone who takes it up, it inevitably brings painful things with it.³³ The Cappadocians emphasized how the presence of death casts its shadow over every joy of married life. In most cases the solution to the sorrow of marriage is to escape it through virginity. The theme of the pains of marriage plays an important role in the teaching on virginity and it cannot be left out of the present discussion.

The pains of marriage was a common theme in the Hellenistic rhetorical tradition, and it became useful in the construction of the notion of virginity in the fourth-century literature. John Chrysostom devotes twenty-two chapters to the pains of marriage and how the virgin escapes them.³⁴ Jerome assumes that the arguments against marriage are well known, so that he need not bother to reiterate them, but

³⁰. Ibid.

³¹. Cf. T. van Eijk, *op.cit.* 214-217. This argument of 'collective suicide' can be traced to an encratite document of the second century, the Gospel of the Egyptians, where the resurrection is thought to be hastened by abstaining from marriage.

³². Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 14,2 (GNO VIII,I, 307,11-12).

³³. Ibid. 14,2 (GNO VIII,I, 307,15-25).

³⁴. John Chrysostom, *On Virginity*, chapters 51-72; E. Castelli, *op.cit.* 68-69; Cf. A. Moulard, *op.cit.* 201-207 for a summary of Chrysostom's thought on the subject.

directs Eustochium to the treatises by Tertullian, Cyprian, and Ambrose on the subject.³⁵ Eusebius of Emessa writes about the pains of marriage as well, making many of the same arguments.³⁶

The Cappadocians were quite zealous in conjuring images of the limitations of marriage in order to create a sharper contrast between it and the ideal of virginity. Gregory Nazianzen refers to the misfortunes of marriage and family life.³⁷ Gregory of Nyssa demonstrates extensively many of these pains even in a hypothetically ideal marriage: Along with the hope of having a child, the young pregnant mother must also consider the possibility of her own death in childbirth. Gregory portrays the anguish of the suddenly widowed father, who reproaches in anger those who had advised marriage. Even if the couple succeeds in having a child, their fears do not decrease. They still fear that something evil happen to it. Gregory describes in this context the situation of the mother who 'splits off her heart with the child, and if she becomes the mother of many, her soul is cut into as many parts as the number of her children, so as to feel in herself whatever happens to them.'³⁸ Gregory then portrays the wife's fear of separation from her husband when he goes away on a trip. Unable to bear the isolation, taking the brief separation from her husband as a meditation on her life in widow-hood she fears in her sense of abandonment that each knock on the door heralds the news of his death.³⁹ Gregory then depicts her actual widowhood. She hates those who try to comfort her and desires death even to the point of death. If there are children, she pities them as orphans; if there are none, she cannot be consoled because there is nothing to carry on the memory of her deceased husband. Facing the enemies, relatives, and servants who take bitter pleasure in her fallen home is too much for her, and she risks a second marriage.⁴⁰ Marriage furnishes us with the material for tragedies. If one examines ancient narratives and the themes of drama,

³⁵. Jerome, Ep. 22,22 (PL 22,409).

³⁶. For a summary of Eusebius arguments see, D.Amand, 'La Virginité chez Eusèbe d'Émèse et l'askétisme familial dans la première moitié du IV^e siècle', 789-794: sufferings in childbirth: Homiliae 6,4;7,15; jealousy: Homiliae 6,4; 7,15; husband's reproaches and recriminations over children: Homiliae 6,4; 7,16. Worries and fears inspired by husband: Homiliae 6,14; 7,15. Concern over children: Homiliae 6,14;7,16.

³⁷. Cf. Gregory Nazianzen, Ep.78 (PG 37,148); Ep.104 (PG 37,204-205); Ep.147 (PG 37,251); Ep.160 (PG 37,268).

³⁸. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 3,6 (GNO VIII,I, 262,5-9).

³⁹. Ibid. 3,6 (GNO VIII,I, 262,11-27).

⁴⁰. Ibid. 3,7-8 (GNO VIII,I, 263,1-264,17).

full of child murders and eatings, illicit unions and every sort of violation of nature, they all begin with narration from marriage.⁴¹

Gregory regrets that knowledge of the blessings of virginity comes too late to be of benefit to him in his own life. Furthermore, chapter 4 attempts to convince us that all vices have their roots in marriage, so that we escape the influence of vice when we renounce marriage. Chapter 12 indicates that just as 'marriage' was the last step away from paradise in Genesis 3, so the renunciation of marriage is the first step on the route of return to paradise. Chapter 14 argues that we conquer 'death' by ceasing to procreate. Chapter 20 argues that, just as one cannot practice two professions at the same time. And in his final exhortation in chapter 23, Gregory asks that we listen to Moses, who commands that we be pure from the defilement of marriage so that we may receive the vision of God. However, does a quick and superficial reading of Nyssa's *On Virginity* give the right picture of Gregory's idea of marriage?

This treatment of marriage by Nyssa (especially in chapters 3 and 4 of *On Virginity*) has puzzled modern scholars and has generated different attempts to explain it. J.Stiglmayr even speculates about Gregory's personal experience of marriage.⁴² According to J.Gribomont Gregory's remarks reflect the fact that this is an early work and Gregory's thought was yet immature.⁴³ M.Aubineau explains it as a product of Gregory's rhetorical forms and devices: 'Many of the details which shock us can be explained by a servile obedience to the rules [of the genre] which do not engage the author very deeply.'⁴⁴ The argument against marriage is for Aubineau primarily a 'scholarly exercise' which does not reveal Gregory's real thoughts on the issue. J.Kirchmeyer sees Gregory's views to merely reflect the general attitude of his time and culture.⁴⁵ M.Hart explains the negative style pointing that Gregory is writing for the many, that is, for those who discern the good according to pleasure. He thus stresses the unpleasant side of married life, implying that virginity, which to

⁴¹. Ibid. 3,10 GNO VIII,I, 265,27-266,9). Cf.T.Camelot, 'Les Traites De Virginitate au IV siècle', 279-280.

⁴². J.Stiglmayr, op.cit. 339.

⁴³. J.Gribomont, 'Le panégyrique de la virginité, oeuvre de jeunesse de Grégoire de Nysse', 258.

⁴⁴. Cf.M.Aubineau, SC 119, chapter 2: 'Rhétorique et diatribe dans un plaidoyer pour la virginité', 83-96.

⁴⁵. J.Kirchmeyer, op.cit. 143.

most people seems to be a less pleasant and thus less choiceworthy form of life, is in fact an excellent way to avoid a good deal of suffering.⁴⁶

The connection of marriage and death by the Cappadocian Fathers has also puzzled modern scholars. Most of them claim that the Cappadocians have somehow distorted married life either through ignorance, prejudice, or simply getting carried away with their rhetorical ability. Although there is some truth in all these attempts to explain the explicit description of the pains of marriage, we should not misunderstand the Cappadocian position. Their rhetoric does not reveal completely their attitude toward marriage.⁴⁷ The true object of the Cappadocians' rhetorical exposition is not marriage itself, but the desire for pleasure, the passionate attachment and misguided expectations of happiness which are the basis of most marriages. When Nyssa for example insists that we are not to judge the good according to pleasure, it does not seem that sexual pleasure is the primary trap he sees in marriage for our judgment of good. It is significant that the Cappadocians have little to say about sexual lust especially compared with treatments like John Chrysostom's in his *On Virginity* for example, where the shame of desiring sexual activity is stressed.⁴⁸ Their task is to lead those still under the control of passions to desire a life of freedom from passion.

It is not the pleasure in marriage which the Cappadocians consider to be the greatest danger for the health of the soul. Pleasure itself is not bad, bad is rather the tendency to use pleasure as the standard for determining what is good or evil. Passion comes when the desire for security and permanence in relationships with other human beings controls the mind and obscures the judgment. Living according to oneself (ὁ καθ' ἑαυτὸν ζῶν) on the other hand, does not necessarily mean withdrawal from human relationships and avoiding all dependence upon others. It means, rather, that one sees clearly that relationships with others is no solution to one's mortality and thus, one is not 'passionately attached' to others out of fear.

Marriage is seen in a more favourable light when it is considered under the aspect of public service rather than the aspect of the search for gratifying

⁴⁶. M.Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 181.

⁴⁷. For a discussion of the use of rhetoric in the Cappadocians see G.Kustas, 'Philosophy and Rhetoric in Gregory of Nyssa', *Kleronomia* 18 (1986), 101-146; idem, 'St.Basil and the Rhetorical Tradition', 221-279; M.Kertsh, *Bildersprache bei Gregor von Nazianz. Ein Beitrag zur spätantiken Rhetoric und Popularphilosophie* (Graz, 1978); R.Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 92-95.

⁴⁸. John Chrysostom, *On Virginity*, 27,4 (SC 125,180-182).

companionship.⁴⁹ To the extent that marriage is free of attachment due to pity and fear, it can be less selfish and the couple can be more available for the service of others. Nyssa uses the terms *φιλανθρωπία* and *λειτουργία* to refer to this sort of involvement with others which is not motivated by passion. In this respect Gregory of Nyssa's description of the hardships of marriage in chapter 3 is not a rhetorical exaggeration, but a fact of life, when one seeks in marriage only permanence and security in companionship.

Thus, the terms marriage and virginity have two levels of meaning in the Cappadocians. In addition to their conventional meaning they come to be, marriage, a metaphor for passionate attachment in general and, virginity, a general attitude to non attachment. In this way we can understand why marriage is characterized as the source of vice: one who 'observes well the delusion of this life with the pure eye of the soul'⁵⁰ and 'banishes himself in a certain way from life as a whole through the retreat from marriage has no community with human vices - I mean greed and envy, anger and hatred, desire of vainglory and the other things as much as they are of this family.'⁵¹ When we cease our attachment to what is not permanent, then we can say we retreat from marriage. Only then can one have immunity (*ἀτέλειαν*)⁵² from vice and not simply have immunity from the burdens of a household and public life. If true virginity or non-attachment is considered true virtue, then marriage or attachment can be spoken of as vice itself.

We can find often in the Cappadocian teaching expressions against the body: 'stooping with the soul toward the pleasures of the body like fatted beasts toward the fodder, living only for the belly and the things after the belly ... reckoning nothing to be good but taking pleasure through the body.'⁵³ But, the most obvious 'pleasures of the body', eating and sexual activity, are not the primary object of this teaching. 'To take pleasure through the body' (*τό ἡσθῆναι διὰ τοῦ σώματος*) has a broader meaning than simply 'to receive pleasant sensations'. All vices take 'pleasure through the body' since all of them are meant to compensate in some way for the mortality of one's own body. The 'pleasure' of the vices is that of participation in the

49. Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, chapters 7-9.

50. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 4,1 (GNO VIII,I, 267,7-8).

51. Ibid. 4,1 (GNO VIII,I, 267,10-15).

52. Ibid. 4,1 (GNO VIII,I, 267,16).

53. Ibid. 4,5 (GNO VIII,I, 267,15-20).

'permanence' of things, people, and nations. The delusion of security and immortality which many pursue in marriage is the expression of the energy which drives all of the passions.

Nyssa calls marriage 'the common starting-point of error' concerning what is truly valuable. Marriage has become a metaphor for the wrong way of joining oneself to what is. Nyssa distinguishes the participation proper to virtue from the attachment proper to vice: 'If one thinks about the things above and ascends with them to God, one is altogether more lofty than such things (earthly wealth and human power) not having the common starting point about such things - I am speaking of marriage.'⁵⁴ The error of the vice is to seek in the impermanent an immortality which can only be found in the grace of God.

Gregory applies a string of references from the scriptures to support his claim that retreat from marriage saves us from evils and delivers us from death:

'For whenever the judgment is lifted which was made in the beginning against those who created discord, and wherever, as the scriptures say, the travail of mothers is no longer "multiplied" and "pain" does not precede human birth, then misfortune is totally removed from life and "tears wiped from our faces" as the prophet says. For then "conception" is not done "in iniquity", nor is our "birth" "into sins", and engendering children becomes something which occurs neither "from blood", nor "from the will of man", nor "from the will of the flesh", but "from God alone". This happens whenever someone conceives in the living core of his heart the incorruptibility of the Holy Spirit, giving birth to "wisdom and justice, sanctity and redemption". For everyone is capable of becoming a mother of these virtues, as the Lord says somewhere, because "he who does my will is my brother, sister, and mother." '⁵⁵

If we study carefully the text we see that Gregory no longer presents virginity as conquering the power of death only through the sufferings it avoids, that is widowhood, orphanhood, loss of children and civic obligations, or by ceasing to bring mortal bodies into the world. Rather, he presents virginity as an alternative form of generation, a form which has its offsprings incorruptibility and virtue. This form of generation is free from death.⁵⁶ Nyssa's remarks in chapter 14 that we should stop conceiving mortal bodies are a parody of the heresy of the Encratites in

⁵⁴. Ibid. 4,2 (GNO VIII,I, 268,17-20).

⁵⁵. Ibid. 14,3 (GNO VIII,I, 308,5-19).

⁵⁶. Ibid. 14,4 (GNO VIII,I, 308,20-309,9).

the Early Church which saw the abstention from procreation to be a way to hasten the second coming. If we accept the need to complete the number of humanity before the resurrection can occur, we might conclude that marriage and procreation would actually hasten the second coming. Nyssa, however, does not go this far in the *On the Creation of Man* and only says that the day will come independently of human will.⁵⁷

Nyssa proposes that people 'establish in themselves through virginity a boundary for death (τὴν τοῦ θανάτου περιγραφὴν), stopping death from advancing further through themselves and placing themselves like a border between death and life (ὥσπερ τι μεθόριον θανάτου καὶ ζωῆς), holding it from moving forward.'⁵⁸ He is not proposing, as it seems at first, that we stop death by ceasing to procreate, but that we stop death from advancing through our souls in the delusion of finding immortality in the esteem of our community and in the survival of our children. The death about which Gregory speaks throughout chapters 12-14 is not the death of the body, but the corruption of the soul through vice. Elsewhere⁵⁹, he makes a clear distinction between these two meanings of death, the death of the body means 'the extinguishing of the senses and the dissolution of the kinship of elements,' while the death of the soul means 'alienation from God.'⁶⁰

Human beings are a border (μεθόριον) ⁶¹ between death and life. They combine in one being the corruptible nature of the body and the ability of the intellect to participate in immortal nature. When the body and the soul are not properly distinguished and the highest element of the soul seeks to satisfy itself in what is lower, the death and corruption proper to the body enters the soul. For Gregory, human beings are themselves the inventors of the vices. Virginity saves us from the power of death when we cease to generate vice in the soul in this fashion. The power of death will not be active, if marriage, that is attachment, does not lay down the material for it.

⁵⁷. M.Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 293.

⁵⁸. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 14,1 (GNO VIII,I, 306,3-7).

⁵⁹. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, 3,13 (GNO II, 385,21-25).

⁶⁰. Ibid. 8,5 (GNO II, 213-214).

⁶¹. Cf.J.Daniélou, 'La notion de confins (methorios) chez Grégoire de Nysse,' *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 49 (1961), 162.

Thus, for Cappadocian theology as it is expressed at its best by Nyssa, with the differentiation of reality into sensible and intelligible we grasp that the sensible parts are all corruptible and impermanent. Possession of an object or even attachment to other human beings cannot satisfy our desire for that which is immortal because all of these composite realities must eventually decompose or die. Death enters our souls through giving these things in our deluded minds a permanence and a reality which they do not in fact have. It is our materialistic conceptions and attachment which tie us to this world of impermanence and brings us suffering when they pass away.⁶² Thus, our misunderstandings of what is real, our materialistic conceptions, defile us and create the passions, not matter itself or our contact with the world.

The following chapter will examine the different meanings and uses of the terms immortality and incorruptibility in relation with the notions of marriage and virginity.

⁶². Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 11,2 (GNO VIII,I, 292,16-293,11).

B.

MARRIAGE AND VIRGINITY - IMMORTALITY AND INCORRUPTIBILITY

The connection between marriage and immortality was an idea widely discussed in the early Church. According to this idea, marriage, as the institution of procreation, was necessitated by the appearance of physical death and gives a kind of immortality by the bringing forth of posterity which safeguards, at least for some time, the survival of the name of the departed. For the Encratites, abstinence from marriage and procreation meant the breaking of the power of physical death: as they had received the resurrection, they already lived on the other side of physical death. They rejected, without explicitly referring to, Plato's view on the relation between marriage as procreation and immortality.¹

The Early Fathers did not completely accept these ideas. Basil of Ancara considers the engendering of children as a consolation for the mortality of human nature. The world had to be filled with new-born people because of the slaughters in wars, and therefore, virginity could not be made a law: 'For how could He, who ... had prepared for those who from immortal had become mortal the succession of their race finding, as has been said somewhere, immortality, (τὴν ὡς εἰρηταί που ἀθανασία εὐράμενος) and therefore saying: "Be fruitful and multiply", how could He at that time command virginity by law?'² For Basil, marriage originates in death, and gives by the engendering of children a kind of immortality. But, virginity

¹. For an account of some of these texts of encratite and gnosticizing theology, see: *T.Zeses, Marriage and Celibacy in the Patristic Works on Virginity*, 164-173; T.van Eijk, op.cit. 212-219; U.Bianchi,(ed.) *La tradizione dell' Enkrateia*.

². Basil of Ancara, *On the True Purity of Virgins*, 5 (PG 30,780A).

gives incorruptibility as actual freedom from passion and lust.³ A concept rejected in the second century encratite literature, the immortality-by-posterity is appreciated by Basil as gift of God.⁴ This concept is received by Basil through Clement of Alexandria⁵ and it is considered a platonic influence on Gregory of Nyssa.⁶ However, it is hardly possible to see more than a very far echo of Plato's *Symposium* in Nyssa's work.⁷ There is a clearer connection with Gregory Nazianzen's *In Laudem virginitatis*: 'καί γάμος, ἀνδρομέης γενεῆς φύσις, ἄλκαρ ὀλέθρου'.⁸

For the Cappadocians the surviving of the name in one's children is another kind of consolation that marriage offers. The children continue the life of its parents, and by accepting their name they fan it. But children only do this for a short time, for they too, being of mortal nature will certainly die leaving behind their posterity nameless. But the virgins will have an eternal name and place in heaven. They will receive, instead of any succession of their family, a name that is better than sons and daughters who often blemish the family. They will obtain instead of a human name, the name of the immortal angels, that will not die. The relative immortality which one acquires by the fact that one's name is carried on by one's children, is still exposed to death. The mortality of human nature is only partly compensated by the succession of posterity. The virgins do not even need the succession of children, because they find satisfaction in themselves. Marriage is a good thing because with it the possibility is given, that the body, affected by sin, is restored to its original integrity by the resurrection.⁹

³. In a certain sense this has something in common with the distinction that Plato makes between immortality-by-engendering which is appropriate to mortal nature, and immortality-by-identity which is the privilege of the Godhead. Cf. T. van Eijk, op.cit. 227.

⁴. Ibid. op.cit. 225.

⁵. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, 2,23 (ΒΕΠΕΣ 7,358–361).

⁶. Cf. M. Aubineau, SC 119,139, where this concept is considered 'd'inspiration platonicienne'.

⁷. See, T. van Eijk, op.cit. 209-211 for a comprehensible account of Plato and Aristotle in this issue and T. Zeses, *Marriage and Celibacy in the Patristic Works on Virginitas*, 134-147 for an outline of ideas in Greek philosophy.

⁸. Gregory Nazianzen, *In Laudem virginitatis*, 124 (PG 37,531).

⁹. Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration*, 8 (PG 45,33). Marriage (as the begetting of posterity) is a consolation for man's mortality in Basil of Ancara, John Chrysostom and Gregory Nazianzen. It gives some kind of immortality for Plato, Clement of Alexandria and Basil of Ancara. Cf. T. van Eijk, op.cit. 235.

The stress on procreation was not a product of stoic¹⁰ influence as R.Price successfully argued¹¹ since the Christian motive was to defend intercourse against Encratite attacks, when stoics and other pagans stressed that every married man had a duty to beget children for the good of his city. The single-mindedness and purity of heart, the superiority of spiritual to merely physical procreation, the expectation of the παρουσία and the consequent otherworldliness were the main notions for virginity. Thus, the paradox of the early Christian writings on virginity and marriage: the stress on procreative purpose¹² was combined with a marked lack of interest in actual procreation since it was spiritual and not physical generation that peopled the church. Man's eyes should be fixed not on an earthly future, but on the age to come, and in any case the world is already overpopulated. Procreation was promoted not because Christians had any duty to have children, but as providing a rational control of marital intercourse and its only possible justification in a Christian context.¹³

Gregory of Nyssa shows his acquaintance with the tradition that marriage was invented outside Paradise, as a consolation for death (παράμυθία τοῦ ἀποθνήσκειν)¹⁴, but in contrast with Plato, Clement and Basil of Ancara, he nowhere explicitly says that it is a way, however inferior, of overcoming death providing immortality.¹⁵ A fundamental difference between these Christian thinkers and Plato also should be noted. For Plato the circular course of time brings back the same souls and thus safeguards their immortality. For Clement, Basil of Ancara and Gregory time has a beginning and an end and whereas the first two think that the process of begetting gives only a relative immortality, Gregory of Nyssa does not explicitly accept even that. Moreover, as Gregory does not speak of marriage as a way to immortality (the overcoming of physical death), he does not contrast it with virginity as the superior way to this goal. He ignores this aspect of marriage, though it had received attention of many before him. However, there is a point that Gregory speaks of procreation, just as Plato does in the *Symposium*, as means of immortality:

¹⁰ Stoics insisted that intercourse must be linked to procreation.

¹¹ R.Price, op.cit. 269.

¹² Cf. Athenagoras, *Plea for Christians*, 33 (ΒΕΠΕΣ 4,308): 'Each of us thinks of his wife with a view to nothing more than procreation. For as the farmer casts seed into the ground and waits for the harvest without further planting, so also procreation is the limit we set on desire.'

¹³ R.Price, op.cit. 269.

¹⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 12,4 (GNO VIII,I, 302,27). Still Gregory does not emphasize as much that marriage was necessitated by man's mortality.

¹⁵ Cf. T. van Eijk, op.cit. 234.

'Genitals contain the provision for the future ... for our race does not continue by means of the eyes or ears or tongue or any other sense. These senses are for the enjoyment of the present, while in our generative organs immortality is secured for humanity, such that death, always working in us, is in a certain sense without effect, since nature is always herself stepping in to fill any gap which remains through successive births'.¹⁶

It must be noted though that for Nyssa and the Cappadocians procreation is a means of immortality for the race, not for the individual. Marriage is a certain consolation for death, but marriage is perhaps no great consolation if one desires one's own immortality. For the Cappadocian thought bearing children does not make them our own any more than owing property really makes the earth our own; any personal immortality we place in having children is the result of delusion. By ceasing to eat of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, that is by ceasing to seek immortality among those things which of their very nature arise and pass away, the judgment which banishes us from paradise is lifted. When we cease to think of our children as our own and invest in their existence and welfare our very being and hope of immortality, the fear of death and isolation does not proceed human birth. When marriage ceases to be a work of passion and becomes instead a rational choice in light of the common good of the community, then conception is not done in iniquity, nor is our birth into sins, but engendering children becomes something which occurs neither from blood, nor from the will of man, nor from the will of the flesh, but from God alone.¹⁷

Of course, for the early Fathers, virginity is, even more than marriage, a way of overcoming physical death. For Basil of Ancara, it gives a kind of immortality superior to the relative and provisory one given by marriage. Moreover, Methodius of Olympus and Gregory of Nyssa extend this idea and say that virginity gives incorruptibility for both present and future. Although Clement of Alexandria has not very much to say on the relation between virginity, immortality and incorruptibility, he seems to suggest that those who practise virginity already partake in incorruptibility.¹⁸

¹⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration*, 28 (PG 45,73CD).

¹⁷ M.Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 298.

¹⁸ Cf.J.Broudéhoux, *op.cit.* 105-106.

In Methodius of Olympus' *Symposium*, the literary parallel of Plato's dialogue of the same name, virginity is the appropriate way to keep one's soul and body undefiled, free from passion and corruption. Both Virginity and Eros aim at immortality; but as T.van Eijk remarks, Plato uses the words immortal or immortality, whereas Methodius mostly speaks of incorruptibility.¹⁹ The link between virginity and incorruptibility is obvious in Methodius.²⁰ Incorruptibility represents the realm of the divine; in order to become like God man has to banish corruptibility, and it is by aspiring to the virginity of Christ that we come to the likeness of God.²¹ Methodius links parthenia with partheia (affinity with the divine). Thus, we find a similar relation between virginity, divinity and incorruptibility. Virginity divinises and, therefore, immortalises.

Basil of Ancara deals with the theme of incorruptibility in his work, *On the True Purity of Virgins*, a work with which Gregory of Nyssa was familiar²² and one whose problematic Nyssa accepts and develops. Basil sharply distinguishes between the external observance of various disciplines and the true incorruptibility of a heart which is free from desire for the things of the body. The ideal of virginity for Basil implies a new ideal of human wholeness or incorruptibility. To be integral and whole in ourselves and undisturbed by desire we renounce all that is not strictly necessary for life in the body.²³ While it is necessary to satisfy the desire for food, it is not strictly necessary to satisfy the desire for sex. According to Basil the sexual passions disturb the soul and mix the soul with the body. The image he uses is that of oil and water, which mix only when agitated. Virginity allows the soul to separate itself and remain pure apart from the body just as oil rests on top of the water, and the virgin thereby comes to experience the incorruptibility which is proper to God and incorporeal beings. Incorruptibility and integrity do not mean the full integration of body and soul. Basil sees the Gospel proposing that we eliminate an element of bodily life, its orientation toward procreation. Incorruptibility means rather the

¹⁹. That makes T.van Eijk, op.cit. 221 think that incorruptibility referring to virginity has not very much to do with the overcoming of physical death, in contrast with the theology of the Encratites.

²⁰. Methodius of Olympus, *Symposium*, 1,1 (SC 95,52-56); 6,4 (SC 95,172-175).

²¹. Ibid. 1,5 (SC 95,64).

²². M.Aubineau, SC 119, 137-142.

²³. Basil of Ancara, *On the True Purity of Virgins*, 25 (PG 30,721AB).

approximation of incorporeal beings, who are whole precisely because they have no body with which to share their nature and divide their interests.²⁴

Basil of Ancara is the first to give to the term incorruptibility a purely moral meaning of 'freedom from passion and lust' and reserve the word ἀθανασία for immortality.²⁵ Other early Christian writers, especially Methodius of Olympus had also developed the term ἀφθαρσία along moral lines, but at the same time used it to refer to immortality. In Methodius' Symposium ἀφθαρσία is the virgins' reward in the world to come.²⁶ In Basil it characterizes their present life.²⁷ Basil connects emphatically virginity and incorruptibility. Incorruptibility (ἀφθαρσία) is a characteristic of virginity, as corruption (φθορά) is inherent to marriage. Here, marriage is not so much seen as the institution of procreation, but as something that inflames passion and lust. Φθορά implies πάθος and ἡδονή, ἀφθαρσία means freedom from it. The virgin already lives in Paradise and already is incorruptible: 'On the other hand, the virgin who has followed Him who leads to Paradise, already enjoys with Him in Paradise, being incorruptible.'²⁸ For the virgin there is neither male or female, neither passion nor lust (πάθος καί ἡδονή). Paraphrasing Paul, Basil of Ancara says that the virgin carries around a dead body, crucified for Christ for sin. The body has been mortified (νενεκρωμένων) because sexual lust has become inactive. Actually, only the virgin's soul is living amidst of men in incorruptibility. It is characteristic that Basil insists on the term of incorruptibility and he does not use the term immortality when he refers to virginity, but when he refers to marriage.

Unfortunately from the Cappadocian Fathers only Gregory of Nyssa engaged in this discussion of marriage and virginity in their relation to immortality and incorruptibility. Gregory Nazianzen and Basil of Caesarea did not follow Nyssa's insightful discussion. Thus, the discussion in this chapter is based almost exclusively on Nyssa's contribution.²⁹

²⁴. Ibid. 51 (PG 30,772B). Cf. T. van Eijk, op.cit. 225-226; M. Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 53; S. Elm, 'Virgins of God', *The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 1994), 116.

²⁵. T. van Eijk, op.cit. 226-227.

²⁶. Methodius of Olympus, *Symposium*, 4,2 (SC 95,128-133); 8,3 (SC 95,206-209).

²⁷. Basil of Ancara, *On the True Purity of Virgins*, 54 (PG 30,777).

²⁸. Ibid.

²⁹. For a broader discussion of the connection of virginity with phthora and aptharsia see P. Pisi, 'La motivazione protologica della verginità: genesis, phthora e aptharsia nei Padri greci', U. Bianchi, op.cit. 625-635. T. Camelot, 'Les traités De Virginitate au IV siècle', 283-285.

Gregory of Nyssa, like Basil of Ancara before him, opposes marriage and virginity as two opposite kinds of fruitfulness: the former, being a life after the flesh, bears fruit for death. Birth after the flesh contains in itself the principle of dissolution. But for those who have left this life after the flesh and have the communion with the Spirit, life and incorruptibility take the place of mortal bodies.³⁰ They conceive the incorruptibility of the Spirit and bring forth 'wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption'.³¹ At this point, Nyssa uses Pauline terminology to characterize the contrast between marriage and virginity, and plays on the ambiguity of such words as life, death and corruption.

For Gregory, virginity means the victory over both physical and spiritual death.³² It both, cuts short the power of death, and gives incorruptibility, which is a characteristic of the divine.³³ In a certain sense, virginity deifies; the virgins are made familiar with God by their incorruptibility.³⁴ True virginity and the zeal for incorruptibility both lead to the contemplation of God.³⁵ Those who abandon marriage are, in a way, beyond time, death and corruption, and dwell in the presence of God. The virgins appear to put an end to physical death, insofar as they do not give it nourishment by engendering children, and to possess incorruptibility, meaning nearness to God.

Like Basil of Ancara, Gregory of Nyssa differentiates the common practice of virginity from true virginity, and he defines the state of true virginity in terms of an imitation of the incorruptibility proper to divine life. At the beginning of his treatise, Basil of Ancara calls for an examination of what constitutes true virginity and what is truly admirable about this state due to the proliferation of hymns of virginity at this time in which he says many praise virginity without a clear notion of what virginity truly is and what makes it choiceworthy.³⁶ True virginity is for Basil the interior incorruptibility of a soul which has purified itself of bodily desires, and the exterior practice of keeping the body uncorrupted through virginity is but an aid for this

³⁰. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 13,3 (GNO VIII,I 305,3-22).

³¹. *1 Cor.1,30; 14,3*.

³². M.Aubineau, SC 119, 428, n.2-3.

³³. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 2,1 (GNO VIII,I 253,1); 4,8 (GNO VIII,I 276,19).

³⁴. Ibid. 1, (GNO VIII,I, 252,7-11).

³⁵. Ibid. 11,6 (GNO VIII,I, 297,3-6). Cf. G.Sfameni, op.cit. 236.

³⁶. Basil of Ancara, *On the True Purity of Virgins*, 1 (PG 30,669).

interior purity. He uses ἀφθαρσία to denote a state of moral purity and ἀθανασία to denote immortality in the life to come.

Nyssa gives little indication within the prologue itself of his *On Virginity* that he means by virginity anything other than celibacy, the renunciation of marriage in order to better lead a life of dedication to God. However, in the beginning of chapter 1 he introduces the notion of virginity in terms of incorruptibility:

'The magnificent form of virginity, which is valuable to all who discern the beautiful in purity, is present only in those whom the grace of God kindly helps in the struggle toward this good desire. It receives its proper praise from the very name with which it is synonymous, for that which is said of virginity according to the custom of the many -that is uncorrupted- is an indication of the purity in it. Thus the excess of the value of this gift may be recognized through an equivalent term, since indeed this alone of all the accomplishments of virtue has honoured by the surname of the Incorruptible One. Even if it is necessary to create an aura of magnificence for this great gift of God, the divine apostle makes it sound excellent enough when, keeping hidden all excess of praises through fewness of words, he calls that which is adorned by this grace "holy and without blemish". For if the achievement of this magnificent state of virginity is to become "holy and without blemish" and if these names apply first and properly "to the glory of the incorruptible God"³⁷ there could be no greater praise of virginity than to show through this that it makes those who have participated in its pure mysteries in a certain sense "divine", sharing in common the glory of God, who alone is truly "holy and without blemish", and becoming familiar with God through purity and incorruptibility.'³⁸

Nyssa uses this term to speak of virginity as an interior quality of the soul. He begins to examine this quality of incorruptibility by mentioning that 'the many' refer to virginity as that which is uncorrupted (τό ἀφθορον). He does not say what 'the many' mean when they call virgins uncorrupted; he only says that the word indicates the purity which is in virginity and the link which the word implies to God, 'the incorruptible One'. It would seem that virginity lies in preserving through adulthood the sexual innocence of youth. Nyssa however supports a different meaning. He moves away from the notion of virginity as a state of being 'de facto' uncorrupted and adds to it the notion that virginity as a true virtue has a quality of permanence and stability, incorruptibility.

³⁷. Nyssa is referring to *Rom. 1,23*.

³⁸. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 1,1-24 (GNO VIII,I, 251,14-252,11).

Nyssa calls virginity an 'idea' or 'form' (εἶδος). Through the 'form' of virginity we participate in the 'form' of God's purity and innocence.³⁹ He notes that only God is properly called incorruptible. True virginity as incorruptible nature involves participation in the incorruptibility of God. Thus, to understand virginity and be truly virgin one must at the same time have some understanding of and share in that type of innocence proper to God, not merely of that type proper to those who lack the experiences which might corrupt them. This understanding of the true virgin bears some similarity with Clement of Alexandria's account of the true gnostic and Philo⁴⁰. For Clement 'the great thing is to abstain from pleasure after having had experience of it. For what credit is it to practice self-control, where pleasure is unknown'.⁴¹ The true virgin for Clement is someone who 'becomes a virgin again through moderation' after the experience of desire as 'a reward for gnosis'.⁴²

Basil of Ancara sees the incorruptibility of virginity as one's ability to imitate the freedom which incorporeal beings have from the influence of the body. In order to avoid defiling the mind through the senses, the strictest of vigilance must be observed over the senses. The incorruptibility of virginity is permanent when the virgin is committed to the task of purifying the mind and preserving in the ascetic discipline which this involves. Incorruptibility relies primarily on the ability of the soul to guard against pleasure and resist its bodily desires. But, in this sense the fact that Basil of Ancara warns his readers strongly against the dangers of the senses reveals that virginity is not in the strictest sense incorruptible.

But for Nyssa, virginity must rely on something more than strength of will, if it is to be truly incorruptible and participate in that innocence and purity which is proper to God. For Gregory, God's grace helps us in the struggle toward the attainment of purity: 'The magnificent form of virginity, which valuable to all who discern the beautiful in purity, is present only in those whom the grace of God kindly helps in the struggle toward this good desire.'⁴³ 'Discernment of the beautiful in

³⁹. Nyssa's thought on virginity is connected in this way with the Platonic theory of forms. Philo uses the phrase 'form of virginity' (*De cherubim*, 15,5,38). He distinguishes between the virgin (παρθένον), who is always corruptible and mortal, and virginity (παρθενία) 'the form which is always the same and eternal.'

⁴⁰. Philo, *De cherubim*, 14,50 (Loeb ii, 38).

⁴¹. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, 7,12,76 (BEΠΕΣ 8,281,15-17).

⁴². Ibid. 7,12 (BEΠΕΣ 8,279,19-21).

⁴³. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 1 (GNO VIII,I, 251,14-17).

purity' involves in some sense a return to the original state which humanity enjoyed in paradise. The final condition of the human being, the goal of all progress in virtue is a return to its earlier condition. For Gregory the inability to discern the truly good from what only appears good is the result of trusting that discernment to the satisfaction of the senses. 'Discernment of the beautiful in purity' is distinguished from 'discernment of the beautiful in the satisfaction of the senses'. Gregory does not say that the satisfaction of the senses is in itself a bad thing. Using the satisfaction of the senses as the standard for determining what is good is, however, something bad.

Nyssa indicates that the only sufficient way to praise virginity is to show that virginity is above praise. He indicates that his task is to show that the goodness of virginity lies in its ability to return the soul to its natural wholeness, something which is desirable in itself and thus of value apart from any praise it receives from the society it is found. Only if virtue is something natural can virtue be 'incorruptible', for only as one discovers this natural harmony and experiences its goodness does the temptation for one's virtue to be 'corrupted' by pleasure or by the opinions of others disappear. Virginity exceeds all of the other virtues in being given the title 'incorruptible'.⁴⁴

The notion of incorruptibility of the true Christian virtue is in fact the theme of Nyssa's entire *On the Christian Profession*. There, Nyssa tries to define the true Christian. Scripture, he says, through the many names and notions it applies to Christ, 'leads us by the hand to the comprehension of his incorruptible nature' which is pure of any passion or evil. We who are synonymous with him by being called Christian must become what we contemplate in this incorruptible nature. We who have the title 'Christian' participate in Christ. Just as each link is drawn when one pulls a chain, so one drawn by Christ shares his qualities.⁴⁵ Christianity is 'the imitation of the divine nature', something which he claims does not exceed the limit of our nature, but is rather the return to our original condition.⁴⁶ We must 'become perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect,' and that means that our deeds must become pure, alien from all evil, in imitation of the divine.⁴⁷

⁴⁴. Ibid. (GNO VIII,I, 251, 21-24).

⁴⁵. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Christian Profession* (GNO VIII,I, 134,9-135,21).

⁴⁶. Ibid. (GNO VIII,I, 136,8-9).

⁴⁷. Ibid. (GNO VIII,I, 138,1-2f).

In *On the Christian Profession* Nyssa proposes to examine the question 'What does it mean to profess to be a Christian?' as a way of assisting the life according to virtue. Gregory describes a story about a monkey who had been trained to dance and dressed up in a dancer's mask and costume for the entertainment of the crowd. A clever spectator reveals the true nature of the creature by throwing out some almonds to where the monkey is performing. Immediately the monkey runs to fetch the food and, 'so that the mask would not be a hindrance to his mouth' tears off 'the cleverly contrived form'. Instead of arousing 'praise and wonder' the monkey moves the spectators to laughter. Vanity, love of honour, love of gain and love of pleasure in fact reveal 'ape-like souls' imitating Christians.⁴⁸

On the Christian Profession then contains similar notions with the ones we found in his *On Virginity* : purity, incorruptibility, imitation of the divine nature or deification, return to our original condition, and true virtue done for its own sake contrasted with the cleverly contrived presence of virtue to achieve some aim other than virtue. In *On the Christian Profession* Nyssa uses these terms without reference to virginity. However, the notion of 'true Christianity' can easily be replaced with the notion of 'true virginity' of *On Virginity* in relation to the qualities which define it. In the story of the monkey Nyssa shows what makes virtue 'corruptible'. In the pretence of virtue, virtue is not its own reward. If one is virtuous for the honour it brings, one may easily do what is not virtuous if it likewise brings honour or some other reward, just as a monkey trained to imitate humans by rewards abandons this task when his food, the natural reward by which his master trained him, comes from somewhere else. True virtue seeks no reward outside of itself and is thus incorruptible. It acts in purity and discerns the good to lie in goodness and purity itself.

For Gregory of Nyssa, clearly, it is not marriage, business, or civic responsibility which engage us with passion and attachment, but the delusions under which we operate in those affairs. Gregory sees one particular delusion among all others as standing in the way of moderation within marriage, business, and community life - the delusion of immortality and security through progeny, wealth, or fame. What he writes against marriage in the third chapter of his *On Virginity* attempts to show the tragic consequences when marriage and social life are burdened

⁴⁸. Ibid. (GNO VIII,I, 131,7-133,20).

with human desires for security and immortality. In this way Nyssa disagrees with Basil of Ancara who tried to differentiate the two meanings of incorruptibility, integrity of character and immortality. Basil uses *ἀφθαρσία* only to refer to integrity of character and freedom from passion and uses *ἀθανασία* to refer to immortality. However, even Basil is aware that the desire for immortality through progeny is very much a barrier for many people to the adoption of virgin life. Sharing in the name of the immortal angels is far better than having mortal children carry on one's name.⁴⁹

The problem of moderating one's bodily desires is complicated by the problem of death. The virtue of moderation requires in turn the virtues of wisdom and courage in the face of death. True virginity, for Nyssa, is that which 'is greater than the reign of death'.⁵⁰ Nyssa in his *Dialogue on the Soul and the Resurrection* and his *Life of Macrina* turns to belief in the resurrection for the solution to the problem of the origin of the passions in the fear of death. But he does not do the same in *On Virginity* following Basil of Ancara and differing from Methodius of Olympus' *Symposium* where the value of incorruptibility is based upon the hope of resurrection. For Nyssa the virgin enjoys the fruit of resurrection in this life.⁵¹

Consequently, it is clear that for Cappadocian theology as it is expressed by Gregory of Nyssa virginity and incorruptibility are closely linked.⁵² It is the incorruptible nature which marks virginity. God grants virginity to those who in flesh and blood are to be set upright after the fall. The passions that caused the fall must be eliminated. Thus, participation in God, both by the descent of the Holy Spirit and by the exaltation of man to a desire for heavenly things, brings with it a harmony which would eliminate the opposition between the flesh and the spirit.

⁴⁹. Basil of Ancara, *On the True Purity of Virgins*, 60 (PG 30,792BC).

⁵⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 14,1 (GNO VIII,I, 305,27).

⁵¹. Ibid.

⁵². Cf.D.Balas, op.cit. 153.

C.

MARRIAGE AND VIRGINITY - CIVIC AND CONTEMPLATIVE LIVES

The tension and polarization between the active life of the community and the contemplative life in virginity was discussed extensively by all the Cappadocian Fathers.¹ The movement towards virginity and the teaching of the Cappadocian Fathers on virginity were not the result of hatred of the sexual activities, but a result of the recognition that the whole of the life of the community follows upon the exercise of sexuality. This is magnificently illustrated in a text from the letter which Basil of Caesarea wrote to Gregory Nazianzen in order to persuade him to join him in a life of retirement. Basil describes the way in which sexual desires and all that follows from them are a burden to a life in pursuit of the truth:

'We must try to keep the mind in tranquillity ... man's mind when distracted by his countless worldly cares cannot focus itself distinctly on the truth. He who is not yet yoked in the bonds of matrimony is greatly disturbed by violent desires, rebellious impulses, and morbid lusts; while he who is already bound in wedlock is seized by yet another tumult of cares; if childless, by a longing for children, if possessing children, by solicitude for their nurture, by keeping watch over his wife, by the management of his household, the protection of his servants' rights, losses on contracts, quarrels with neighbours, contests in the law-courts, risks of business, or the labours of the farm. Every day brings with it some particular cloud to darken the soul; and night takes over the cares of the day, deluding the mind with the same cares in fantasy. There is but one escape from all this - separation from the world altogether. But withdrawal from the world does not mean bodily removal from it, but the severance of the soul from sympathy with the body, and the giving up city, home, personal possessions, love of friends, property, means of subsistence, business, social relations, and

¹. For a comparison of the two ways of life (virginity and marriage, contemplation and active life) in early monastic sources, see K.Ware., 'The Monk and the Married Christian', 72-83.

knowledge derived from human teaching; and it also means the readiness to receive in one's heart the impressions engendered there by divine instruction ... Now to this end solitude gives us the greatest help, since it calms our passions, and gives reason leisure to sever them completely from the soul. For just as animals are easily subdued by caresses; so desire, anger, fear, and grief, the venomous evils which beset the soul, if they are lulled to sleep by solitude and are not exasperated by constant irritations, are more easily subdued by the influence of reason. Therefore, let the place of retirement be such as ours, so separated from the intercourse of men that the continuity of our religious discipline may not be interrupted by any external distraction.²

The practice of virginity and withdrawal, for Basil, creates the circumstances in which the mind can attain the calm and focus necessary both to erase its misconceptions derived from habit and engender new habits in accord with the divine teaching. The enemies of this process are those things which arouse passions, thus disturbing the mind and hindering it from seeing clearly. So, tranquillity is not an end in itself, but 'a source of purification for the soul.'³ The senses and the activities in the world are not evil for Basil. They are only hindrances insofar as they prevent the concentration which allows the mind to commune with God and set itself apart from its sins.⁴ For him it is passion which is harmful, more than the object. Isolation allows one to concentrate on the hindrances which come from inside and remove the ignorance which produces passions in any situation.

Thus, Basil of Caesarea differs from Basil of Ancara in the emphasis he places upon the value of the life of retirement for the advancement of truth and understanding. Basil of Ancara speaks of ἔργα of God and the purity attainable when all occasions to passion are removed. Basil of Ancara's work on virginity rather resembles that of Methodius of Olympus in this respect. But for Basil of Caesarea, 'When the mind is not dissipated upon extraneous things, nor diffused over the world about us through the senses, it withdraws within itself, and of its own accord ascends to the contemplation of God. Then when it is illuminated without and within by that glory, it becomes forgetful even of its own nature; no longer able to drag the soul down to thought of sustenance or to concern for the body's covering, but enjoying

². Basil of Caesarea, *Epistle 2* (R.Deferrari i, 9-13).

³. Ibid.

⁴. Cf.J.Gribomont, 'Le renoncement au monde dans l'ideal ascetique de saint Basile', 282-307; 460-475.

leisure from earthly cares ...'.⁵ Basil of Caesarea's point that virginity avoids distraction is connected with Paul's teaching on 1Cor.7. However, Paul argues from a practical point of view for remaining unmarried, when Basil considers virginity and isolation a principle of sanctification. Paul considers worldly cares a distraction to the service of the church. Basil insists that they are distraction from the task of purifying the mind from error and guiding it to the divine commandments.

Involvement in marriage and community life are extensions of the needs of the body. For Basil of Ancara the body is the vehicle of the soul. What is strictly necessary for life in the body is determined only from the standpoint of the individual. From this perspective we can see nourishment as the only need of the body. Gregory of Nyssa elaborates more on this aspect. The fact that the body is corruptible, the fact that it dies, requires that each generation reproduces itself in children. The children require a family and the management of a household, and the management of a household requires the organisation of a community. Thus, the inclusion of marriage requires a considerable change in the type of moderation which holiness requires. Marriage not only means contact with the pleasures of touch and the experience of sexual desires. Marriage also brings with it a new level of involvement in the affairs of the community which the virgin escapes.

Nyssa's *On Virginity* develops the notion of ἀπάθεια, freedom from passion, to include a notion of service and dedication to others and explains the possibility of freedom from passion in the midst of marriage and activity in the world.⁶ Nyssa does not simply assert that marriage is incompatible with contemplative life. *On Virginity* seems to say little concerning service and activity in the community. However, behind Gregory's rhetoric it is important to see the ancient Greek terms he uses referring to marriage and virginity. He applies the term λειτουργία, public service, to married life.⁷ Λειτουργία in ancient Greek society referred to the duty of wealthier citizens to finance public functions, such as choral performances (χορηγίες). He also applies the term ἀτέλεια, exemption from taxes, to describe the advantage of the virgin life.⁸ The use of this terminology points to the relationship of marriage and virginity to civic duty and the way in which the privilege

⁵. Basil of Caesarea, *Epistle 2* (R.Deferrari i, 15).

⁶. See the previous chapter, Virginity and Apatheia. Augustine also states that the life of virginity is not in order to avoid troubles, but to serve the Lord (*On Virginity*, chapter 22).

⁷. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 7,3 (GNO VIII,I, 284,8).

⁸. Ibid. 4,1 (GNO VIII,I, 267,16; 14,3 (GNO 308,5).

of the latter depends upon the labour of the former. Instead of saying that those who are exempt from the burdens of the body anticipate in this life the life of the resurrection, Gregory says instead that such an honour belongs to those who make a contribution to the life of the flesh.⁹

Gregory also refers to God as benefactor (*χορηγός*), the first lover of doing good (*πρῶτος ἐραστής εὐποιίας*) and calls *φιλανθρωπία* the proper and distinguishing characteristic (*ἴδιον γνώρισμα*) of God.¹⁰ God is benefactor in his relationship to humanity. The incarnation is an act of *φιλανθρωπία*, philanthropy or friendship with humanity.¹¹ The term *φιλανθρωπία* is popular with all the Cappadocians and comes from the Alexandrian theology of Clement and Origen.¹² Virginity and withdrawal bear a certain resemblance to God in their freedom from the burdens of bodily existence. This is stressed by the Cappadocians in many points, but also in their exposition of the virginity of the Trinity.¹³ However, they also stress that human life attains a deeper similarity to divine life as it becomes beneficent and willing to assume the burdens of life out of love.

According to Nyssa those who deny marriage 'falsify the teachings of the church,' 'desert the guidance of the Holy Spirit,' and 'hate God's creatures as defilements, as things carrying evil and responsible for evils'. These people are 'outside of the courtyard of the meaning of the mysteries ... in the stable of the wicked one ...'.¹⁴ Nyssa claims that the heretics who deny marriage depart from 'church doctrine' because they do not understand that virtue is a mean between two vices.¹⁵ Those who despise marriage, put the virtue of moderation or chastity in the

⁹ Ibid. 14,4,9 (GNO VIII,I, 309,9-11).

¹⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration*, 15 (PG 45,48A-49A).

¹¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 2,2,6 (GNO VIII,I,254,12).

¹² For an exposition of this notion of philanthropia in the Alexandrian theology see C.Osborne, *Eros Unveiled. Plato and the God of Love* (Oxford, 1994), especially chapter 7: Philanthropia, God's Love for Mankind in Origen, 164-184. For the notion of *φιλανθρωπία* in Nyssa's theology see W.Völker, *Gregor von Nyssa als Mystiker*, 44-46 and M.Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 64. In Basil see D.Constantelos, 'Basil the Great's Social Thought and Involvement', *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* XXVI (1981), 82. In Nazianzen see J.Plagnieux, op.cit. 220. Cf. also G.Downey, 'Philanthropia in Religion and Statecraft in the Fourth century after Christ', *Historia* 4 (1955), 199-208; C.Spicq, 'La Philanthropie hellénistique, vertu divine et royale', *Studia Theologica* 12 (1958), 169-191; Bishop Daniel, 'On Divine Philanthropy, From Plato to John Chrysostom', *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ* 53 (1982), 612-626.

¹³ See previous chapter, The Theology of Virginity.

¹⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 7,1,10-22 (GNO VIII,I, 282,11-23).

¹⁵ Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, 2 (GNO VII,I, 132,11-12).

opposite extreme from those who lack firmness of soul against pleasure.¹⁶ Moreover those who renounce marriage necessarily renounce themselves as well, since every human being is in fact the fruit of marriage.¹⁷

The mean that Nyssa recommends is not virginity, but moderation within marriage. When he speaks against marriage, it is a marriage which is founded upon the satisfaction of the passions. Those who seek in marriage the fulfillment of the immortal lay for themselves the foundation of a tragedy, as another mortal human cannot totally satisfy this longing for the immortal. Those who are free of this delusion have a different basis for marriage that of *λειτουργία* (public service).¹⁸ When marriage is considered under the aspect of pleasure,¹⁹ then it is something one should seek to escape. But marriage is seen differently when it is considered under the aspect of moderation and duty and what one owes to the community. Thus, Christian life cannot ignore the legitimate needs of the body, particularly the service of bringing children into the world. Nyssa departs completely from Origen in this respect. He is aware of the need to serve the body as it is seen in his interpretation of 'Give us this day our daily bread',²⁰ where he insists that it commands us to give the body its due. Moderation, staying within the legitimate needs of the body, makes us equal to angels who have no material needs at all. Origen on the contrary totally spiritualises this passage by making it refer only to 'heavenly bread'.²¹

The use of the term *λειτουργία* to describe marriage and of the term *ἀτέλεια* to describe the celibate life²² points to the relationship of marriage and virginity to community life. But, Nyssa calls also God *χορηγός*, in God's relationship to humanity,²³ and calls the incarnation an act of love of *φιλανθρωπία*.²⁴ By calling marriage *χορηγός*²⁵ and *λειτουργία*, Nyssa is

¹⁶. Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 7, 1,22-2,24 (GNO VIII,I, 282,24-283,26).

¹⁷. Ibid. 7,2,24-3,3 (GNO, VIII,I, 283,26-284,6). The Cappadocians defended marriage against those who considered it sinful. Cf. P.Pisi, *Genesis e Pthora, le motivazioni protologiche della verginità in Gregorio di Nyssa e nella tradizione dell'encrateia, edizioni dell'ateneo* (Roma, 1981), 103-194.

¹⁸. Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, 3,12 (BEPES, 8,38,32-34): 'ἔχει γὰρ ὡς περ ἡ εὐνουχία οὕτω καὶ ὁ γάμος ἰδίας λειτουργίας καὶ διακονίας τῷ Κυρίῳ διαφερούσας.'

¹⁹. See Gregory of Nyssa's *On Virginity*, chapters 3 & 4.

²⁰. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Lord's Prayer*, oration 4.

²¹. Origen, *De oratione*, 27 (PG 11, 505-562).

²². Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 4,1 (GNO VIII,I 267,16); 14,3 (GNO VIII,I, 308,5).

²³ Ibid. 2,1 (GNO VIII,I, 253,13).

²⁴. Ibid. 2,2 (GNO VIII,I 254,12).

²⁵. Ibid. 3,10,25 (GNO VIII,I 267,11).

perhaps suggesting that married life bears a greater resemblance to divine life than virginity in its role as benefactor and provider. Virginity though may bear a greater resemblance to divine life than marriage in their freedom from the burdens of bodily existence. When marriage is used as a mean to attain one's own security and pleasure, it does not reflect the divine act. Only when marriage becomes λειτουργία rather than an act of passion does the generation of children become an act in imitation of the divine. Those who separate the soul from the body have no delusion that their children are 'their own' and the bearers of their honour or immortality.

In *The Life of Moses* solitude is not presented as a withdrawal from responsibility or an isolation from others, since the like-minded who share the retirement must be 'fed by us'²⁶ as Moses cared for his flock. The journey to perfection which Moses represents is not an individualistic spirituality.²⁷ The theophany is not presented as simply a detached, individualised contemplation of the divine essence, but as an impetus for action. The contemplative does not remain in isolation, but is strengthened and energized by his vision to free others.²⁸ The traditional athletic imagery of asceticism is reapplied to apostolic involvement. The road to perfection as described by Nyssa involves the complementary dimensions of contemplation and action, withdrawal and engagement, each rooted and founded in the person of Christ.

Nyssa reverses the usual understanding of the relationship between virginity and marriage. In contrast with 1Cor.7,6 where marriage is a concession to human weakness, Nyssa tells us that virginity is a concession to human weakness. Virginity can itself be viewed as a compromise with respect to the perfection of true virtue.²⁹ Instead of saying that the virgin better than anyone else is able to oppose his sexual impulses and refuse temptations to worldly wealth, power and honour,³⁰ Nyssa claims that virginity is for those who are too weak to stand up to the burden of nature. The 'burden of nature' is not only the troubles and concerns of every day life, but also the insecurity and loss that accompany all worldly activity. One must be able to

²⁶. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, 2 (GNO VII, I, 38,20-25).

²⁷. P.O'Connell, 'The Double Journey in Saint Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses', *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 28 n.4 (1983),305.

²⁸. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, 2 (GNO VII,I, 43,13-20).

²⁹. Nyssa reverses also Origen's opinion in the matter. For Origen marriage is a concession to weakness and a state inferior to virginity. Cf.M.Hart, op.cit. 224).

³⁰. This is the view of John Chrysostom in his *On Virginity*, 27 (SC 125,176-182).

stand up to the burden of nature ἀνδρικῶς (courageously). The weakness of the virgin consists in their lack of courage.

The virgin's way life allows somebody to have amnesia about the bodily things and thus puts the passions to sleep. But this does not mean that they have gained the wisdom about the body which will allow them to both know the needs of the body and be free of passion. Were they to marry they might fall into immoderation. Without true wisdom, it is very difficult to pursue the spiritual life and community life by raising children. For most people who want a spiritual life, it is better to remain a virgin rather than let passion gain entrance into their soul. Nyssa insists that Christian virtue, in imitation of God, must be beneficent and generous and that the path to virtue must consider the good of the whole. Both marriage and virginity and indeed all efforts toward perfection in the Christian life must be considered in this light: 'The divine is imitated through doing good, doing that which is proper to the divine nature.'³¹ The 'tax-exempt' status of the virgin is justifiable only if it promotes something which is of benefit to all and supports in some way the social realities which in turn support it.³² Thus, Nyssa calls virginity a sponsor or public patron.³³ Virginity has a certain value for the whole community and is not an escape from civic duties. The presence within the Christian community of people living virgin lives reminds everybody of the higher aspirations which should guide communal life.

This question of the responsibility of the Christian to the community life emerged with particular urgency in the fourth century and inevitably was dealt by the Cappadocians. The Cappadocians publicly supported the ascetic movement of their age because of its freedom from the desire for earthly immortality through progeny, wealth, fame and power. J.Meyendorff has pointed out that actually 'no Christian leader responsibly opposed the monastic movement in principle' and that this shows that 'monasticism was unanimously accepted as reflecting some basic aspects of the Christian faith itself.'³⁴ Virginity in the fourth century was sometimes regarded as replacing martyrdom as the Christian witness. But the Cappadocians also thought that, for most people who look forward to the pursuit of pleasure, wealth or status

³¹. Gregory of Nyssa, *In Psalms*, 1,7 (GNO V, 45,15-16).

³². Cf. M.Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 64.

³³. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 14,4 (GNO VIII,I, 309,10-19).

³⁴. J.Meyendorff, 'Saint Basil, Messalianism and Byzantine Christianity', *St.Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly* 24 (1980), 219.

and are consumed in the cares of marital and civil duties, virginity can contribute to their spiritual sanctification and development. However, along with the public approval of virginity, the Cappadocians often note that the ideal of renunciation, in its rejection of the community life, may fall short of the Christian ideal of service.

The tension between civic and contemplative lives is illustrated by the dilemma which Gregory Nazianzen faced upon his ordination to the priesthood.³⁵ Torn between his own desire for retirement and his father's wish that he be his assistant, he tried to find a compromise. This did not work. He was ordained against his will by his father on Christmas Day in 361. Gregory thought of this action as one of tyranny on the part of his father, and fled Nazianzus to live in seclusion with his friend Basil of Caesarea with whom he had spent time prior to his ordination. However, he returned to Nazianzus by Easter time to fulfill his duties and delivered an oration in defense of his action to the congregation at that time. He later published a longer oration in which he describes the nature of his conflict.³⁶

To Gregory, this world, the world of economic and political affairs, the world of business, is devoted to the pursuit of wealth and power. To be involved in such a life is alien to the spirit by nature. Gregory describes the conflicts of the life of 'affairs' with that of contemplation. Yet he could not quite bring himself to condemn the life of business altogether. He came from a prominent and very active family. His sister Gorgonia was a happily married woman, his father a successful married bishop, his brother Caesarius a distinguished physician who occupied a post of confidence at the court of Constantinople and Gregory's parishioners were not all monks. He himself spent many hours and days in his service and was a landowner all his life: 'It is better both to attain the good and to keep the purification. But if it is impossible to do both it is surely better to be a little stained with your public affairs than to fall altogether short of grace; ... often one who is in public life and has small success has had a greater reward than one who in the enjoyment of liberty has not completely succeeded.'³⁷ In his orations on his brother Caesarius and on baptism, he suggests that even in this alien state the life of contemplation is not impossible. He was much opposed to Caesarius' life in the midst of the Byzantine court, and tried to

³⁵. J.Plagnieux discusses this tension extensively, but independently from virginity, *op.cit.* 141-160.

³⁶. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.2,7* (SC 247,96). For Nazianzen's teaching on hesychia, see J.Plagnieux, *op.cit.* 219.

³⁷. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.40,19* (SC 358,238-240). Cf.C.Tsirpanlis, *op.cit.* 35.

take him away to the 'philosophic life'. Yet, he manages hopeful words for this way of life.³⁸

The ideal life for Nazianzen, the philosophic life, is a combination of the active and contemplative lives. This goes back to Philo who equated praxis with catharsis and with the devotional and ascetical 'practices' which led the philosopher up to the contemplation of God.³⁹ Contemplation 'raises us from the earth and leads us back, carrying us to the Holy of Holies and to what is akin with our minds'.⁴⁰ Action cleanses the soul, opens it to receive the Lord and to testify to its love through good deeds. With his classical instinct for seeking the mean between extremes, he answers the question, in many of his writings, of the relationship between the contemplative life and the active life. What of the married men and women tending to their worldly affairs? Had they no part in the contemplative life? Were they excluded simply by virtue of being married?

Nazianzen does not condemn social involvement altogether.⁴¹ His understanding of human existence and of its political, social and economic dimensions is closely connected with his understanding of Christology and Soteriology. In the most worldly aspects of human experience, he looks for manifestations of Christ and opportunities for deification. He finds them in just and merciful government service, in the hardships of poverty and even in the payment of taxes, but especially in the giving and receiving of charity in all its forms.⁴²

The conflict between the active and the contemplative life is perhaps the central drama of Gregory Nazianzen's own life. All his life he struggled between his own desire for retirement and the demands laid upon him by the Church and the pattern of flight and return became a characteristic motif of his career.⁴³ Although elected and consecrated as bishop of Sasima by his friend Basil he never went to Sasima and he again withdrew to enter a life of retirement and hesychia. When in 379 the small Nicene minority in Constantinople turned to him with an urgent plea to

³⁸. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or. 7,7* (SC 405,192-196).

³⁹. Cf. R.Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, 138.

⁴⁰. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or. 14,4* (PG 35,864A).

⁴¹. Cf. V.Harrison, 'Poverty, Social Involvement, and Life in Christ according to Saint Gregory the Theologian', *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 39, no.2 (1994), 151-164.

⁴². Ibid. 164.

⁴³. R.Ruether, *op.cit.* 32.

come to their help Nazianzen accepted. Thus, we are presented with a paradox of a man, who had fought continually for his solitude, and who, having achieved it, surrendered it voluntarily to take one of the most difficult tasks in the Eastern Church! He left this great post two years later to return to Nazianzus. He took charge of the diocese for two more years. Finally, he spent the last years of his life in retirement on his estates, yet with a keen interest and a helping hand for the affairs of the Church or for young people who appealed to his wisdom and guidance. This was his own synthesis, the kind of mixed life that suited him and also the larger conflict that remained unresolved. Nazianzen spent most of his life indecisively between the two.⁴⁴

Nazianzen's conflict was also faced by another Cappadocian, Amphilochius of Iconium. Amphilochius' desire to live as a hermit remained unfulfilled, because in 374 he was, at the request of Basil, consecrated bishop of Iconium and the first metropolitan of the new province of Lycaonia. Amphilochius accepted the position only reluctantly.⁴⁵ However, he governed his diocese very successfully, restoring order and discipline everywhere. A prominent figure in the controversies of his time, he defended the Christian doctrine against the Arians, Messalians and Encratites. Thus, he chose the life of action and service and emphasized the teaching of the Church which admires virginity, but honours marriage, too; it welcomes continence with modesty and godliness, and esteems anchoretic departures from mundane affairs with humility, but in no less awards and honours the Christian life lived in the world.⁴⁶

A discussion of the connection between virginity and pride is going to help us to reach the heart of the Cappadocian teaching on this point. Gregory of Nyssa mentions in his *On Virginity* the passion of pride calling it 'the wish to be above others, a seed and root of every thorn and root of sin, which in fact has its origin from the cause of marriage.'⁴⁷ It is puzzling for M.Hart the fact that Nyssa connects pride and marriage⁴⁸ when all the other writers of this period very often mention it as

⁴⁴. For an extensive discussion of Nazianzen's struggle see D.Tsamis, *The Dialectical Character of the Teaching of Gregory the Theologian*, 38-50. Cf. also P.Chrestou, *The flight of Gregory Nazianzen* (Athens, 1958); S.Papadopoulos, 'Gregory the Theologian', *Nea Sion* (1990) PB, 99-102.

⁴⁵. Basil of Caesarea, *Ep.16* (R.Deferrari, II, 410-416).

⁴⁶. Cf.K.Bonis, op.cit. 95.

⁴⁷. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 4,2,11-15 (GNO VIII,I 268,20-24 .

⁴⁸. M.Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 72.

the great temptation of the unmarried life.⁴⁹ Hart can only explain this as an ironical statement of Nyssa. But, he oversees that Nyssa's statement probably is connected with the discussion about the origin of marriage, the creation of man and his fall. Pride is indeed the passion that characterized those who were unmarried in that era, not those who were married, as somebody can see from the teaching of Eustathius of Sebaste.⁵⁰

Pride, the sin of the angels, was the characteristic of the teaching of Eustathius in his rejection of marriage. Eustathius established ascetic communities in Armenia, Paphlagonia, and Pontus, but his rigorous ascetic practices and beliefs were condemned by the synod of Gangra.⁵¹ The followers of Eustathius were characterized by their particular dislike of marriage, as four of the thirteen articles against them in the Synodal Letter of Gangra pertain to their rejection of marriage: 'As the Eustathians condemn marriage and maintain that no married person has hope with God, they have dissolved many marriages.'⁵² The other practices of the Eustathians which are condemned by the synod show that their condemnation of marriage is a part of their broader theology which despises the laws of society in general. The Eustathians perceived very clearly how marriage ties one to society with its attachments. Virginity means freedom from law or custom, and for the Eustathians this meant separation from community life as a whole. The synod considered pride to be the primary cause of the Eustathian error:

'We write this, not in order to shut out those who in the Church of God, and in accordance with the Holy Scriptures, desire to lead ascetic lives, but those who make asceticism a pretext for pride, exalt themselves above those who lead simpler lives, and introduce innovations contrary to the Holy Scriptures and the canons of the Church. We too admire virginity which is accompanied with humility, and approve continence when joined to dignity and virtue. We approve the renunciation of worldly affairs, if done with humility, and honour married intercourse

⁴⁹. Cf. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 8,8 (SC 405,258-262); *Or.* 37,13 (318, 296-300); John Chrysostom, *On Virginity*, 8 (SC 125,114-118). Augustine's *On Virginity* is devoted almost entirely to the topic of humility.

⁵⁰. Eustathius is one of the more colourful figures of fourth century. For a good account of his career see J.Gribomont, 'Eustathe de Sebaste', *Saint Basile: Évangile et Église, Mélanges I* (Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1984), 95-116.

⁵¹. Although T.Barnes, 'The Date of the Council of Gangra', *Journal of Theological Studies* 40 (1989), 121-124 argues for a date c.355, most of the scholars have dated the council of Gangra to c.340.

⁵². C.Hefele, *History of the Councils*, v.2 (Edinburgh, 1896), 26-327. Cf. Gribomont, 'Le monachisme au IV^e siècle', 404-407.

as seemly, nor do we despise riches if united with righteousness and benevolence.'⁵³

The synod affirms the goodness of property and marriage and implies that while Christians honour those who renounce these things, they do not thereby consider family and community life to be without merit.

The pride of the Eustathians lay in their rejection of family and their contempt for civic life. As Nyssa, points out, those who despise marriage forget that they were born from marriage, forget the tree of which they are the fruit.⁵⁴ Pride is thus the vice which forgets one's dependence upon the others. Earthly virgins seeking to imitate angels, forget the body and the community. Gregory of Nyssa lists humility together with charity and magnanimity as that virtue which is lacking in 'those who reckon virtue to lie in being apart from others and like a wild beast (οἱ τό ἄμικτον τε καί θηριῶδες ἀρετήν νομίζοντες).'⁵⁵

Gregory Nazianzen in his funeral oration on the death of his sister Gorgonia, points out the way in which her marriage helped her to avoid the danger of pride and to reach perfect moderation: '

'She so excelled in moderation and so surpassed all the women of her own day, not to mention those of old who were greatly famed for moderation, that in the two universal divisions of life, I mean the married and the unmarried states, of which one is more sublime and divine, but more difficult and perilous, while the other is lower but safer, she avoided the disadvantages of both and chose and united the sublimity of the one with the security of the other. She was moderate without being proud, blending the virtues of the married and the unmarried states, and showing that neither of these binds us completely to or separates us from God or the world. And so the one of its very nature is not to be altogether shunned nor the other exclusively praised. But it is the mind which nobly presides over both marriage and virginity, and these, like raw materials, are ordered and fashioned to virtue by the craftsman, reason.'⁵⁶

Thus, Nazianzen shows the reconciliation of the virginal and the married life, of the active life of the community and the contemplative life.⁵⁷

⁵³. C.Hefele, op.cit. 335-336.

⁵⁴. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 7,2,24-29 (GNO VIII,I, 283,26-284,3).

⁵⁵. Ibid. 23,3,25-26 (GNO, VIII,I, 337,18-19).

⁵⁶. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 8,8 (SC 405, 258-260). Cf.A.Theodorou, op.cit. 113-114.

⁵⁷. Cf.C.Christakis, 'Macrina and Gorgonia: Two Mothers of the Orthodox Church', op.cit. 29.

In a way the Eustathian problem was a discussion of the compatibility of virginity and the life of isolation with the community life. The synod of Gangra clarified some important aspects on Christian virginity. The renunciation of marriage was not out of hatred for it, but in the light of a life more beautiful and choiceworthy. One should not consider oneself above others because he chose virginity but, remaining humble, one should choose it for the honour it gives to God.

The relationship of Basil's theology of renunciation to that of Eustathians is very important in this discussion. It has been examined in detail by J.Gribomont and J.Meyendorff.⁵⁸ Gribomont finds that Basil's theology shares the Eustathian idea that serious Christian life can only come apart from the renunciation of marriage and worldly affairs. Basil clearly contrasts the life of retirement with the 'public life' that is, with the involvement in civil life through marriage and business. He distinguishes between withdrawal from one's own will or the life of the flesh, proper to the life of all Christians, and withdrawal from social affairs, proper to the life of the ascetic. As a result he does not theoretically exclude those Christians occupied with worldly affairs from the community of those who are 'denying themselves' for Christ, although he thinks it is difficult to fulfill both ideals. Despite Eustathius' close and long-lasting friendship with Basil, there are fundamental differences between the two concerning marriage, virginity and worldly affairs. For example, Basil does not advocate that anyone who is married simply abandon a spouse for the ascetic life.⁵⁹

Basil loved the life of renunciation. However, his life as a whole was an active life, both as the legislator and organizing force for the practice of asceticism in Asia Minor and as bishop of Caesarea. He stressed the importance of service in the process of sanctification. He wished to integrate the life of the renunciant as much as possible into the life of the larger church community. Gregory Nazianzen, in his

⁵⁸. Cf. Basil of Caesarea, *Epistle 223,3* (R.Deferrari iii,290-292). For a brief history of Basil's relation with Eustathius see P.Beagon, 'The Cappadocian Fathers, Women and Ecclesiastical Politics', *Vigiliae Christianae* 49, (1995), 168-169. On the influence of Eustathius on Basil and a full bibliography in their relations see D.Amand, *L'ascèse monastique de saint Basile*, 52-61. Cf. also J.Gribomont, 'Saint Basile et le monachisme enthousiaste', 122-144; J.Meyendorff, 'Saint Basil, Messalianism and Byzantine Christianity', 219-234; W.Clarke, *St.Basil the Great*, 159-162; P.Rousseau, op.cit. 233-269.

⁵⁹. For parallelism between the doctrines condemned at Gangra and the teaching of Basil see J.Gribomont, 'Le monachisme au IV siècle en Asie Mineure', 405-406.

funeral oration for Basil, says that his friend sought to combine the advantages of solitary and community life while eliminating the disadvantages of each:

'The solitary life and the community life were then in conflict in many ways, and neither completely possessed advantages or disadvantages that were unmixed. The one is more tranquil and stable and leads to union with God, but it is not free from pride, because its virtue escapes testing and comparison. The other is more practical and useful, but does not escape turbulence. Basil reconciled and united the two in the most excellent way. He caused hermitages and monasteries to be built, not far from his cenobites and his communities of ascetics. He did not divide and separate them from each other by any intervening wall. He brought them close together, yet kept them distinct, that the life of contemplation might not be divorced from community life or the active life from contemplation, but, like the land and the sea, they might interchange their blessings and be united in their sole object, the glory of God.'⁶⁰

According to Basil of Caesarea the life of isolation cannot be achieved in neglect of the life of community.⁶¹ It was possible for a Christian dedicated to asceticism to lead a life that was active and community-minded. However, he insisted on the renunciation in a way as a help towards independence from attachment to one's own family and group. The possession of a family and private property presents a private attachment in competition with community life. Basil, unlike the Eustathians, does not base his recommendation of virginity upon the dislike of marriage, but simply upon the recognition that remaining unmarried allows for a more perfect dedication to virtue. Gribomont's conclusion that Basil's position is 'nearer to the condemned ascetics than to the fathers of the Council of Gangra'⁶² does not seem to be correct. Basil, in accord with the Synod of Gangra, urges us to renounce marriage in the light of a life of greater beauty. But also, his organisation of ascetics into communities with close ties to the larger church seems to have been a solution to the problem encountered in the Eustathian rejection of civil life. Thus, Basil brought asceticism into the service of the Church.⁶³

⁶⁰. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.43,62* (SC 384,260).

⁶¹. Basil exemplified in himself his ideal for activity. The principles of his social activity are expressed in three main texts: *Sermon 6 on Luke 12,16* (PG 31, 262-278); *Sermon 7 on Matthew 19,16-26* (PG 31, 278-304); and *Sermon 2 on Psalm 14* (PG 29, 264-280). The bibliography on his social activity is immense. Cf. I. Karayannopoulos, 'St. Basil's Social Activity: Principle and Praxis', P. Fedwick (ed.) *Basil of Caesarea: Christian, Humanist, Ascetic* (Toronto, 1981); D. Constantelos, 'Basil the Great's Social Thought and Involvement', 81-86; S. Giet, *Les Idées et l'Action Sociales de Saint Basile*; P. Chrestou, *The Sociology of Basil the Great* (Athens, 1951); For a complete bibliography on this issue K. Bonis, *Basil the Great of Caesarea* (Athens, 1975), 170-179 and J. Quasten, *Patrology*, v. III, op.cit. 204-236.

⁶². J. Gribomont, 'Sainte Basile et le monachisme enthousiaste', 135.

⁶³. W. Clarke, *St. Basil the Great*, 120-126.

Basil supports a way of life which he himself has seen to produce men and women of great holiness. Marriage and worldly business are rejected as obstacles to this way of life not because they are dishonourable as such. His interest is in finding a way which enhances the probability of attaining virtue, not in determining the absolute requirements for Christian life. The Cappadocians are united in their concern to integrate the life of contemplation and the life of community. Yet, Basil of Caesarea does not explain how it is possible to develop virtue amid ordinary life without renunciation or how it is possible to engage oneself in the life of the community and retain one's purity of intention without the aid of virginity to remove the temptation and distraction which lies in having to consider the interests of one's own family or property.

It is significant that Basil did not create or promote separate monastic communities, as Pachomius was doing in Egypt. This can be reflected also in his monastic rules which did not create strictly cenobite communities, but rather combined some community life with the eremitical principle, so that communities of monks dwelt in the same neighbourhood as cells of hermits, these latter being seen as the more advanced and perfected form of contemplative life.⁶⁴ The entire emphasis of Basil's teaching was on the building-up of the entire body of the Church. In his conception, those who strive to become 'perfect Christians' (τέλειοι χριστιανοί) by remaining virgins, should not separate themselves from the community, but only from worldly goods, thus setting an example for all. The Council of Gangra was right in discovering in the circle of Eustathius some extremist trends. But there is no evidence whatsoever that Basil ever accepted such excesses. Indeed, he never required celibacy or condemned married priesthood, or considered that the perfect ascetics are above works of charity.⁶⁵

Gregory of Nyssa saw that the Eustathians had dealt with a problem within Christian thought which had yet to receive a full and adequate treatment, a problem which continued to appear even in the writings of others of his time whose orthodoxy was unquestioned. The synod of Gangra did not bring the problem to an end. At the time that Nyssa writes on virginity, the problem was no more with the Eustathians, but with the Messalians. However, the Messalian problem of the second half of the

⁶⁴. Cf. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 43, 62 (SC 384, 258-260).

⁶⁵. J. Meyendorff, 'St. Basil, Messalianism and Byzantine Christianity', 223.

fourth century in Asia Minor may have been a continuation of the Eustathian problem.⁶⁶ Nyssa's refutation of those who despise marriage in chapter 7 of his *On Virginity* indicates that the Eustathian issue was still in his mind. The last chapters of the book probably refer to the Messalians, although it is not certain that the 'enemies of marriage' of chapter 7 is identified with them.⁶⁷ The abuses that Nyssa lists in chapters 22 & 23 indicate that he aimed to a more comprehensive theology of virginity and renunciation and not to launch an offensive against a particular group.⁶⁸

The Cappadocians continued thus to face in Asia Minor perverted forms of Christian asceticism. While the council of Gangra condemned the Eustathians, the Messalians were anathematized at the council of Side (around 390). It is worth noting that this council was presided by Amphilochius of Iconium. Among the monks of Eastern Asia Minor there was therefore, in the fourth century, a continuous tradition of ascetic extremism. While Councils like Gangra and Side issued formal condemnations of these extreme groups, the Cappadocians, major spokesmen of orthodox monasticism, were attempting to channel monastic spirituality away from the sectarian danger into the mainstream of Christian tradition. Early Christian monasticism was exposed to the two temptations of Messalianism and Platonic intellectualism. Both implied anti-social individualism and flight from responsibility in the visible world. The Cappadocians started a long process of integration, without succeeding fully in the first try, but defining the general direction which later will become in the East the accepted pattern.⁶⁹

Gregory of Nyssa explains that freedom from passion in the midst of marriage and worldly activity is possible only for those who are able to investigate

⁶⁶. Cf. J. Gribomont, 'Saint Basile et le monachisme enthousiaste', 143. J. Meyendorff, 'Messalianism or Anti-Messalianism? A Fresh Look at the Macarian Problem', *Kyriakon: Festschrift Johannes Quasten*, v. II (Münster-West., 1975), 589.

⁶⁷. For the connection between Nyssa and Messalianism see J. Gribomont, 'Le De instituto christiano et le Messalianisme de Grégoire de Nysse', *Studia Patristica* 5 (1962), 312-22; R. Staats, 'Messalianism and Antimessalianism in Gregory of Nyssa's De Virginitate', *Patristic and Byzantine Review* 2 (1983), 1-25.

⁶⁸. For a broad bibliography on the connection between Gregory of Nyssa and Messalianism see R. Staats, *Gregor von Nyssa und die Messalianer* (Berlin, 1968), 132-133. Meyendorff has convincingly argued that the writings of pseudo-Macarius have the same intent as the theology of the Cappadocians and that their author was not a Messalian, but he could have belonged to the very circle of Basil's friends. This is assisted by the close parallelisms that Jaeger draws between the so-called Great Letter of Ps.-Macarius and the De Instituto Christiano of Nyssa. Cf. W. Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature*. What is not certain is whether Macarius was influenced by Gregory (Jaeger) or whether Gregory used Macarius as a source (Gribomont).

⁶⁹. J. Meyendorff, 'Messalianism or Anti-Messalianism?', 590.

reality and discern what is true in any circumstances. For the great majority of human beings who are not dedicating to seeing truth in this fashion, a life of renunciation under a rule may be of greater benefit to their character. Nyssa directs these people to Basil, whose guidance of their life would help them avoid the overzealous discipline of the body common to ascetics as well as direct their way of life toward service to others and humility. So Gregory sees Basil as an ally in his attempt to moderate the angelic life.

Moreover, Nyssa manages in chapters 3-9 of his *On Virginity* to overcome a problem which even his brother Basil had found difficult: how marriage and contemplation can be effectively combined? Nyssa reconsiders passions and their origins, pointing to a freedom from passion which does not require the renunciation of marriage and worldly activity for its foundation. Nyssa seems to say in the example of patriarch Isaac,⁷⁰ in the metaphor of the wise farmer who can skillfully let a little water loose from the channel,⁷¹ and in the caution to the weak not to enter a contest above their ability,⁷² that marriage may be a higher realization of virtue than that generally found among celibates. But this apply only to marriages undertaken as an action and as a service rather than to satisfy the passions. An enlightened marriage is superior to the virtue generally found among celibates, just as it is superior to the virtue generally found among those who are married. But, is it superior to the celibate life such as one finds in Basil of Caesarea who combines contemplation and activity in the community?

When Nyssa speaks harshly of 'those who reckon virtue to lie in being apart from others and like a wild beast, he adds that these people 'do not recognize the commandment of charity (ἀγάπη) or know the fruit of magnanimity and humility'.⁷³ Nyssa writes against those Christians for whom contemplation is a goal in itself and whom isolate themselves off from their environment. His ideal is to bring together moral philosophy with contemplative philosophy.⁷⁴ A.Meredith notes that Nyssa in *The Life of Moses* and in the first *Homily on Ecclesiastes* is probably not in favour of the life of mind and mystical union as the ultimate goal of the philosophic

⁷⁰. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity* (GNO VIII,I, 284,10-17).

⁷¹. Ibid. (GNO VIII,I, 280,9-281,10).

⁷². Ibid. (GNO VIII,I, 285,19-22).

⁷³. Ibid. (GNO VII,I, 337,18-21).

⁷⁴. Gregory of Nyssa, *In Psalms*, 2,3 (GNO V, 74-79). Cf.W.Völker, *Gregor von Nyssa als Mystiker*, 223.

endeavour. Of course 'how precisely Gregory here conceives the interrelation of virtue and contemplation is not absolutely clear.'⁷⁵ However, Gregory seems that he moves in favour of the opposite position to that supported by Plato's 'mystical' treatises where 'the vision of beauty and ultimate reality is the goal to which the life of virtue is a means.'⁷⁶

Contemplation in Christian life includes a response of gratitude which in turn engenders generosity toward others. Nyssa describes virginity in terms of the passionless generation of the Son by the Father in the Spirit as an indication of the freedom from passion which is found in love and generosity.⁷⁷ Incarnation also, is an indication that true virginity is not attached to the ease of incorporeal existence, but is willing to assume the burden of human existence for the sake of humanity. Through *σύνεσις* Christians contemplate the light of truth operating within their minds, connecting them with the immortal and incorruptible, what truly is (*τό ὄντως ὄν*) and they imitate the philanthropia of God who does not remain on high in community with angels, but who as Christ, the source of incorruptibility (*τῇν πηγήν τῆς ἀφθαρσίας*) enters the world through virginity.⁷⁸

The life of a virgin who is dedicated in the life of renunciation and contemplation has common aims with the life of a philosopher. Both abandon a simply human life for a life which imitates the angels in its freedom from the body and the passions of community life. Both want to be free of the attractions of money, pleasure and power which tie one to civic life. But Gregory of Nyssa does not find these two ways of life completely the same and he criticizes the way of life of the pagan philosopher and the way of life of any Christian group which has as its exclusive aims a god-like freedom and self-sufficiency. He seems to doubt that Christianity and philosophy share this goal of self-sufficiency. The Christian God does not proudly remain above all. But, neither his entrance into the world accept the earthly desires and ambitions. God's action is not an *apatheia* which is content to remain above all and contemplate. Gregory says that what Jesus says in the Sermon of the Mount is 'invisible to those imprisoned to the cave'. Yet, those who would

⁷⁵. A.Meredith, Homily I, Gregory of Nyssa, Homilies on Ecclesiastes, *Proceedings of the Seventh International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa*, St.Andrews, 5-10 September 1990 ed. S.G.Hall (New York, 1993), 145-158.

⁷⁶. Ibid.

⁷⁷. See the chapter, The Theology of Virginity.

⁷⁸. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 2,2,11-18 (GNO VIII,I 254,17-24).

imitate 'the purity which is freedom from passion' must undertake voluntary humility and thus imitate the incarnation, in which the 'the Lord of creation dwells in a cave'.⁷⁹ Gregory criticizes the Christian solitary life and the pagan philosophy at the same time.⁸⁰ The ascetic ideal and the philosophical ideal involve detaching from the life of a particular nation and family. But then the Christian ascetic ideal seeks to identify oneself with a larger community and to contribute not just to the good of one's family or nation, but to the good of the whole.

Consequently, for the Cappadocians, the ideal of Christianity is an ideal of magnanimity or 'largeness of heart' (*μακροθυμία*). In contrast, the tendency of philosophy is to detach oneself from family and nation and to identify one's good with the life of mind. The life of the body is a distraction, an 'evil' which stands opposed to the 'good'. But for the Cappadocians evil lies only in vice, in the separation from God.⁸¹ The virgin does not strive to be separate from anything but sin, the passion of a soul lost in delusion, not the passion which is a natural part of bodily existence. The choice of the life of the mind in neglect of the community is thus a vice, though the life of the mind is higher and more important than community life as such. Nyssa approves of withdrawal in order to free the mind from its delusions and passions, but insists that *apatheia* is grounded in *φιλανθρωπία* and *ἀγάπη*.⁸² The virgin who is purified of passion does not separate from the body of Christ as a whole, of which it is only a part. He uses his virtue for the good of the whole rather than for himself.

⁷⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Beatitudes*, 1 (GNO VIII,II, 78,1).

⁸⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 23,3,25-29 (GNO VIII,I, 337,18-21).

⁸¹ Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Christian Profession* (GNO VIII, I, 139-140). Heaven is on earth for those who separate themselves from vice.

⁸² Cf. Clement of Alexandria where the true Gnostic is purified by Greek philosophy (*Stromateis* 7,3 ΒΕΠΕΣ, 8,249), adding love to knowledge (*Stromateis* 7,10 ΒΕΠΕΣ, 8,272-273). This Gnostic *apatheia* 'advancing through love' makes us 'similar to God' and 'equal to angels' (*Stromateis* 7,14 ΒΕΠΕΣ, 272-273).

CHAPTER FIVE

THE TRUE VIRGINITY

THE TRUE VIRGINITY

What after all do the Cappadocians consider true virginity? Gregory of Nyssa in his *On Virginity* interprets the ascetic commandment of virginity in a philosophical sense.¹ One need only compare this work with similar attempts by Greek and Latin writers, the books of Tertullian, the *Symposium* of Methodius of Olympus or the *De Virginibus* of Ambrose, to see the difference of Gregory's philosophical approach to the issue.² True virginity requires for the Cappadocians not only temperance of the flesh, but also purity of all senses. It requires pure thought, deliverance from all passions, love for the neighbour and for God.³ For Gregory Nazianzen, true virginity is the purity of mind and not bodily virginity solely.⁴ In his nineteenth rule Basil of Caesarea supports that the one criterion for self-control is abstinence from whatever leads the soul into destructive pleasure. In this sense for Basil too it is not bodily virginity, the actual physical virginity, that matters as the state of the soul that it ought to produce.⁵ And for Nyssa, achieving true virginity '... is not as simple as one might think, nor is it confined to the body; it pertains to all things and extends even to thought which is considered one of the achievements of the soul.'⁶ Virginity

¹. Nyssa compares a virgin community to a 'chorus of philosophers' pursuing the ideal of the 'philosophic life'. This is a piece of symbolism very frequent in Gregory's ascetic writings, but not found in Basil. Cf. W. Jaeger, op.cit. The term φιλόσοφος βίος is used in the *Sermo Asceticus* (Migne PG 31,881B), but is not found in the other works of Basil. Cf. W. Clarke, *The Ascetic Works of St. Basil*, 141. On the philosophic life see P. Rousseau, op.cit. 61-92; S. Elm, *Virgins of God*, 44-45. Gregory Nazianzen uses 'philosophy' of the monastic life (cf. *Or.* 7,9,4 SC 405,202). See A. Malingrey, *'Philosophia.' Étude d'un groupe de mots dans la littérature grecque des Présocratiques au IV^e siècle après Jésus-Christ* (Paris, 1961), 207-261 for a fuller discussion of this concept.

². Cf. W. Jaeger, op.cit. 24.

³. Gregory Nazianzen, *Praecepta ad virgines*, 72 (PG 37,584); *Exhortatio ad virgines*, 50-100, (PG 37,636-640); *Or.* 37,19 (SC 318,310). Cf. D. Tsamis, *The Dialectical Character of the teaching of Gregory Nazianzen*, 54-56.

⁴. Gregory Nazianzen, *Or.* 8,8 (SC 405,260); *Or.* 37,10 (SC 318,992). Cf. C. Tsirpanlis, 'Saint Gregory the Theologian on marriage and the family', 33-38.

⁵. A. Meredith, 'Asceticism - Christian and Greek', 324-325.

⁶. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 15,1 (GNO VIII,I 301,24-310,2); 18,1 (GNO VIII,I 315,24-316,4); 18,5 (GNO, VIII,I, 320,25-27).

is a metaphorical term implying a quality of the soul rather than a condition of the body. In its absolute and perfect form it is that purity which is to be found only in the divine Being. When it is applied in a derivative sense to the human soul, it refers to its participation in that quality of the divine nature. The soul of the pure man becomes a link (σύνδεσμος)⁷ between the human and the divine world. The quality of virginity therefore is related to the process of perfection (τελείωσις) of the true Christian who aims at attaining the divine good.⁸

As Jaeger has shown this approach to the subject is ontological and Platonic. Nyssa follows Clement and Origen, for whom both Basil and Gregory Nazianzen had a great admiration. Virginity is a profession that teaches those living in the flesh to become similar to incorporeal nature. Purity (καθαρότης) had been one of the predicates that Greek philosophers had attributed to the nature of the intellect. Gregory of Nyssa applies this view to the discussion on virginity. The intellect is the link between the animal world (including that part of man which belongs to it) and the divine. Purity becomes the road by which man ascends to the divine. This is what Gregory understands by virginity. The interpretation of virginity as *καθαρότης*, *ἀφθαρσία* and *ἀπάθεια* makes it possible for Gregory to use it as a bridge to connect his Christian theology with the philosophical theology of the Greeks and to turn the latter to his own use. It must also be noted that virginity is in this scheme closely related to a fundamental concept of Gregory's theological anthropology, the idea of perfection and virtue.

The primary pedagogical problem which the Cappadocians face in their teaching on true virginity is how to persuade those who are still under the control of passions to desire a life without passion, how to convince those who judge what is good by the satisfaction of the senses of the goodness of judging what is good apart from the satisfaction of the senses. They knew what 'being virtuous' means to most people. Those who consider happiness to consist in the satisfaction gained through the senses generally experience 'doing what is right' as something which asks them to deny themselves this happiness for the sake of being 'good' or 'noble'. Society, in order to provide the motivation for 'being good' offers the pleasure of praise reinforced with the threat of punishment. Praise offers no mean incentive for virtue,

⁷. The concept of 'link' plays a dominant role in Neoplatonic thought.

⁸. Cf. W. Jaeger, *op.cit.* 25.

since harmony with others and holding their esteem is pleasant and carries with it various privileges, while blame involves being cut off from one's community and the safety and companionship that it provides. Moreover, esteem among one's community offers a certain immortality and seems to substantiate one's self within the opinion of others.

By praising virginity Nyssa can offer to his audience the pleasure of self-esteem and community esteem in order to make up for denial of the pleasure of sex, companionship and family which remaining unmarried would involve. But in doing so he would not be praising true virginity. The love of honour is itself a passion, the passion of vanity. The love of one's own goodness or superiority is the passion of pride or conceit.⁹ Praise can never genuinely move someone to discover the freedom from passion (ἀπάθεια) of true virginity: 'However, the only sufficient praise of virginity is to declare that this virtue is greater than praise and to admire its purity by life rather than by speech. One who lays down encomia, doing this by a love of honour, seems to realise that the drop of his own sweat will be worthy of mention for having added to the limitless sea, if, indeed, he believes that human speech is able to create an aura of magnificence for such a grace. For either he is ignorant of his power or he does not know what he is praising.'¹⁰

Moreover, virginity has been given to humanity 'as a co-worker and aid' in order to avoid handing over the soul to the things which change. Virginity is a 'profession', 'an art and a power of the more divine life, teaching those living in the flesh to become similar to incorporeal nature.'¹¹ The problem for Nyssa is the confusion of body and soul whenever the soul seeks immortality through the body. The art of virginity works to separate this confusion. Virginity is not an attempt to deny or repress one's desires. Eros seeks that which is immortal or that which is believed on some level to be a means to immortality. The task of virginity, then, is to shift our quest for immortality from possession of material things to participation in the immaterial and intellectual.

Seeking to escape death and separation through marriage cannot maintain any balance in the midst of the troubles of life. Knowing no immortality except that

⁹. Augustine's treatment of virginity stresses also this aspect.

¹⁰. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 1,37-45 (GNO VIII,I, 252,24-253,5).

¹¹. Ibid. 4,9 (GNO VIII,I, 277,1-3).

offered through the body, the impermanence of all things and death seems to threaten the very life and being. We should separate ourselves from such a life which guarantees our suffering. This does not mean avoiding the hardships of marriage, but leading a life of virtue, that stops seeking the pleasant and avoiding the painful. The greater part of suffering does not lie in what is painful to the body, but what is painful to any soul which has bound itself through its eros to things which are impermanent. Nyssa likens this world of impermanence and the passions it engenders to a river made rough by stormy currents.¹²

The solution he proposes involves a change in attitude toward all which one encounters:

"Therefore, since such changes, according to a necessity of nature, come inevitably with pain for one who becomes passionately attached, there is only one escape from such evils: not to hand over the soul to any of the things which change, but, to the extent it is possible, to separate it from intercourse with all empassioned and fleshly life and become outside of sympathy¹³ with one's body as well, so that, by not living according to the flesh, one may not become liable to the misfortunes of the flesh. This means to live by the soul alone and to imitate to the extent possible the way of life of incorporeal powers, who "neither marry nor are given in marriage".¹⁴ For them, work, concern and success, is to contemplate the Father of incorruptibility and to beautify their own form through the imitation of the archetypal beauty which is possible."¹⁵

Nyssa's solution parallels closely the language of Basil in his letter to Gregory Nazianzen encouraging him to come and join him at his place of retirement from the world: "There is but one escape from all this - separation from the world altogether."¹⁶ The separation Basil proposes is a form of monastic life wishing to escape the cares of married life and the distractions of managing a household: "Severance of the soul from sympathy with the body, and the giving up city, home, personal possessions, love of friends, means of subsistence, business, social relations, and knowledge derived from teaching."¹⁷ For Nyssa though, separation is when the soul does not attach itself to any of the things which change. The list of things from which one is to separate oneself are for Nyssa similar to the list Basil

¹² Ibid. 4,6,20-33 (GNO VIII,I 274,19-275,4).

¹³ For a further discussion of the term sympathy see M.Aubineau, SC 119, 330-331, n.1.

¹⁴ Mt.22,30; Mk.12,25; Lk.20,34-35.

¹⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 4,8 (GNO VIII,I, 276,7-21).

¹⁶ Basil of Caesarea, *Epistle 2* (R.Deferrari, i,11).

¹⁷ Ibid.

gives, but the manner of separation differs. The solution is indeed separation from marriage, but that means for Nyssa ceasing to be attached to the possession of things that change.

For Nyssa, virginity 'does not take part in the concessions to pleasure permitted to the common life, but changes the direction of its erotic power from bodily things to the intellectual and immaterial contemplation of the beautiful'.¹⁸ In chapter 5 of his *On Virginity*, Gregory speaks directly of the value of virginity of the body:

'Well, then, toward such a disposition of the soul virginity of the body has been contrived for us, in order especially to inspire a forgetfulness and amnesia for the soul from the impassioned movement of nature, since one is induced by no necessity to be condemned to the lower liabilities of nature. For, once one is free from such necessities, one is no longer in danger of turning away little by little through becoming habituated to that which appears to have been conceded by a law of nature and thereby also becoming ignorant of the divine and unmixed pleasure which only purity of heart, when it holds sway in us, hunts after by nature.'¹⁹

The Cappadocians realize that the needs of the body and the pleasure experienced by satisfying them are natural. The problem comes, when by habit we cease to view these needs as a necessity of nature and instead seek the pleasure of satisfying them for the sake of pleasure itself. The longing of one sex for another is the area we seek our ultimate fulfillment, although we recognize the impermanence of these relationships. Our hearts seek by nature to be pure, however the more obvious pleasures of the body can easily obscure the pleasure of the purity of the heart. In the impermanence of the world, the pure of heart rests in the permanence of God. If we base our judgment about what is good and choiceworthy on the tendencies of our sensual nature alone, we may then seek that permanence through attachment to another human.

In this respect, virginity of the body has certain advantages. It allows one to let go of those anxieties and experience the 'pleasure' of purity of heart. The reduction of bodily and material needs which a virgin life involves is not designed to make life easier for its own sake, but in order to make easier an experience which will

¹⁸. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 5 (GNO VIII,I, 277,24-278,1).

¹⁹. Ibid. 5,21-31 (GNO VIII,I, 278,1-11).

change our relationship to all human needs. Gregory of Nyssa, in chapters 5 and 6 of his *On Virginity* presents a very similar argument for virginity to that which Basil gives for monasticism in his letter to Gregory Nazianzen. According to both, Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa virginity of the body can provide the calm and focus necessary for the soul to return to itself and through itself rise toward the apprehension of God.

Nyssa explains virginity of the body by an analogy with water flowing from a spring. The common life is similar to what happens when the water from a spring spreads out into many small streams and becomes diffused over a broad area. In this condition it is of little use for farming. The virginity of the body, on the other hand, is similar to constructing a channel to collect all the streams for better use. The mind which spreads out everywhere toward whatever pleases it lacks the ability to reach 'the truly good'.²⁰ A pipe can cause water to flow straight upward against its natural tendency downward by allowing it no other direction in which to flow.²¹ If the soul seeks satisfaction among bodily things, then to deny the soul access to these things will force it eventually to turn its energies toward itself for its satisfaction. Its artificial satisfaction will help toward the discovery of purity of heart, the true and natural good of the soul.

Nyssa justifies the lives of Elias and John the Baptist, two unmarried saints with this reasoning. They separated themselves 'from the sequence of human life' in order to avoid the deception about 'the discernment of the truly good' which occurs through the senses and in order not to become accustomed to '*mixture*' in the good.²² Being 'outside of nature' and living 'the way of life of the desert' go together. One has no children, wives, or anything merely human with which to be preoccupied.²³ In this way, one achieves a life free of outside disturbances to contemplation. Elias received the power from God to control the rain and the dew, to close the heavens to sinners and open them to the repentant.²⁴ The art of the virgin life is the ability to direct one's energy and erotic power, symbolized as water, in order to dry up and deny life to what is sin and nourish the pure pleasure of the soul.

20. Ibid. 6,2,15-19 (GNO VIII,I, 280,19-22).

21. Ibid. 6,2,22-31 (GNO VIII,I, 281,3-15).

22. Ibid. 6,1,1-10 (GNO VIII,I, 278,15-24).

23. Ibid. 6, 1,30-31 (GNO VIII,I, 279, 19-20).

24. Ibid. 6,1,21-24 (GNO VIII,I, 279, 10-13).

According to Nyssa, these men would not have achieved the level of their freedom from concern for food and clothing 'if they had been made soft to the pleasure-passions of the body by marriage.'²⁵

It appears from the examples of Elias and John the Baptist that Nyssa is insisting on the necessity of renunciation and ascetic withdrawal for spiritual progress. We are to learn from Elias and John the Baptist that those who wish to join their thought to God should 'engage in none of the matters of living' and that 'it is not possible for one dissipated by thought for many things to go straight forward toward the comprehension and desire of God.'²⁶ However, this is not Nyssa's final word in the matter. Nyssa in this point establishes the value of renunciation, not its absolute necessity. He does not dismiss the importance of the example of Elias and John the Baptist, but their manner of being 'outside of nature' is not the conformity with the divine nature Gregory has in mind.

Nyssa associates the way of life of his brother Basil with the lives of Elias and John the Baptist in the funeral oration on Basil and in the prologue of his *On Virginity*. But, in chapters 7-9 of *On Virginity*, Gregory modifies his teaching of chapters 5-6 and modifies the position of his brother Basil on this point. However, he stresses the importance of the virginity of the body for providing both the focus or concentration of mind and the dying out of the passions necessary for the experience of purity of heart. In chapters 19-21 Nyssa, states that 'bodily virginity is a co-worker and a benefactor of the interior and spiritual marriage' (τὴν σωματικὴν παρθενίαν τοῦ ἔνδοθεν καὶ πνευματικοῦ γάμου συνεργόν τε καὶ πρόξενον γίνεσθαι)²⁷. In this phrase Gregory introduces Paul's argument, that the unmarried state facilitates spiritual union with God while the married state hinders it. He notes that it is possible for one person to serve two skills such as farming and navigating, but insists that 'if someone intends to lay hold of one soundly, he must abstain from the other'²⁸. There are two marriages to be chosen, one accomplished through the flesh, the other through the spirit, and 'the concern about the one makes the separation from the other necessary.'²⁹ However, this exposition in contradicts

²⁵ Ibid. 6,1,32-38 (GNO VIII,I, 279, 26-27).

²⁶ Ibid. 6,1,38-46 (GNO VIII,I,280, 4-8).

²⁷ Ibid. 20,1,1-11 (GNO VIII,I, 325,6-8)

²⁸ Ibid. 20,2 (GNO VIII,I, 325,12-13).

²⁹ Ibid. (GNO VIII,I, 325,13-16). For the notion of the spiritual marriage to the Virgin Christ see the previous chapter, Christ the Archvirgin.

again what he says in chapters 7-9 of his *On Virginity* where he elaborates on the ideal of combining married and spiritual life. Indeed, Nyssa is attempting to shift the dualism of Paul's discussion of earthly marriage and spiritual marriage in order to clarify precisely what in our involvement with marriage and worldly activity really stands opposed to spiritual marriage. The dualism Gregory wishes to emphasize is that which exists between the love of true wisdom and the love of bodily pleasure. He tells us that true wisdom is the partner in spiritual marriage for both men and women alike.³⁰ The mind which is defiled by pleasure cannot approach this wisdom. One must establish a wall between the senses and the heart so that the heart does not seek its satisfaction in the senses.³¹

The opposition between the love of wisdom and the love of pleasure does not constitute an absolute dualism inasmuch as bodily pleasure exists only through the delusion in which the highest element of the soul seeks its sanctification in the enjoyment of the senses.³² Nyssa uses the ambiguity of the word 'pleasure' to his advantage. He makes a distinction between pleasure as something agreeable by nature to the senses or to the soul and pleasure in the more technical, Stoic sense of disordered affection. Thus, we can discern that the bodily union which is opposed to spiritual marriage is not marriage or sexual intercourse as such, but the satisfaction of the soul's longing for the immortal in association with other human beings. Only pleasure in the sense of disorder or excess is incompatible with spiritual marriage. Thus, this position is consistent with Nyssa's position in chapters 7-9 of the compatibility of marriage and spiritual life. Bodily virginity is a co-worker and benefactor of spiritual marriage being in its most proper sense the soul's refraining from erotic interest in the body. In one who is moderate, the body has its proper pleasure and the soul remains pure and united with wisdom. If we do not differentiate the notion of pleasure, then we will read chapters 19-21 of Nyssa's *On Virginity* as insisting upon literal abstinence from marriage and all which is pleasure.

Moreover, for Nyssa, if we truly 'grasp the excess of the grace' of virginity we will at the same time grasp that it is neither 'simple' nor something which arises from the body, but is an 'accomplishment' of the soul.³³ One who 'cleaves to the true

³⁰ Ibid. 4,28-45 (GNO VIII,I, 328,7-8).

³¹ Ibid. 21,1,1-20 (GNO VIII,I, 328,16-22).

³² Cf. Ibid. 18, 2,1-6 (GNO VIII,I, 319,9-14).

³³ Ibid. 15,1,1-6 (GNO VIII,I, 309,23-310,2).

bridegroom by virginity' must not only be removed from bodily defilement, but must equally and with the same firmness avoid communion with everything wicked. One must guard the heart against every 'adulterous passion' which are not necessarily connected with sensuality: 'anger, greed, envy, enmity, slander, hatred'.³⁴ Virginity is not avoiding bodily defilement, it refers to the whole of life. There is a certain unity of all the vices, in the sense that any one is sufficient to alienate the soul from the Lord.³⁵ For Nyssa nothing from the body touches the soul and defiles it. Only the soul's own attachments defile it, and from that perspective one's bodily virginity is a secondary concern, a possible way to free oneself from attachment.

The Cappadocians often stress the unity of the virtues³⁶, insisting that virginity is not confined to bodily purity, but is seen in every activity. Nyssa especially agrees with the Aristotelian idea that virtue lies in the mean and he warns that, although self-discipline is necessary, excess in either direction will deter the soul from achieving its end. Like Plato, Gregory teaches that there are no individual virtues or vices, but only one virtue in man. In the treatise *De instituto Christiano* he uses as his example the virtues that lead up to the peak of perfection, whereas in the *On Virginity* he uses the vices that lead down to the abyss of extreme wickedness; but both cases illustrate the theory that virtues as well as vices all depend upon another. Chain is only another word for the concept of ascent, which in turn leads to the image of the highest peak.

The movement toward true virginity requires the cooperation of God, requires grace, and is not solely within the power of the rhetor to inspire. Nyssa recognizes the limits of his to direct his readers to the discovery of their participation in life of God. True virginity is not an opinion which may be taught nor even a conclusion at which one arrives through reasoning, but an insight which one must have for oneself, an insight toward which the rhetor may only point to. Thus, the grace of God must help in the struggle. However, for Gregory grace is not something foreign to the mind in the sense that human nature might in some instances remain without it. Grace is rather the original light of truth operating within the mind by which it is able to

³⁴. Ibid. 16,1,9-11 (GNO VIII,I, 311,25-26).

³⁵. Ibid. 15,1,6-21 (GNO VIII,I, 310,2-17).

³⁶. Cf. Origen's idea on the unity of virtues and on that virginity should accompany all virtues; H. Crouzel, *Virginité et Mariage selon Origène*, 98-100.

reflect what is true. The rhetor may point us to this grace, but only we may recognize it operating within ourselves.³⁷

Most people however, are quite unaware of this divine grace within themselves and are immersed in delusions, which prevent their minds from reflecting what truly is, and alienate them from God. Most people are convinced only of the reality of what they sense. True virginity is a condition of the soul and, as such, is invisible to the senses. Nyssa in order to make virginity something that most people may appreciate, he makes it a visible reality.³⁸ The unmarried state is such a reality, but Nyssa does not direct his efforts solely towards the praise of virginity as an unmarried state. This is because then he would have to identify the life of virtue with a life of celibacy and distort the nature of true Christian virtue, which is not attached to any particular way of life.

However, to present the greatness of virginity to most of his readers, Nyssa makes it in some way a visible and cosmic reality. In the end of the chapter 2 of his *On Virginity* Nyssa composes a praise of virginity which identifies virginity with celibacy. He appeals to the readers' prejudice that the visible is the truly real in order to lead them toward the understanding of invisible reality. Those who live as celibates make virginity a cosmic reality, in some sense visible to all, and provide a certain iconic function for most people who require visible evidence of purity and find the quality of detachment difficult to see in someone married and occupied in the world.

The author of *the sermo asceticus* which is traditionally³⁹ attributed to Basil of Caesarea giving a paraphrase of Gregory's *On Virginity* says that those who participate in virginity according to reason⁴⁰ (τούς κατά λόγον μετιοῦσι τοῦτο τό χάρισμα) must not only refuse to produce children, but must also be virgin in their whole life and character. Gregory's view is also very similar to Clement of Alexandria's who makes a distinction between irrational continence (ἄλόγως ἐγκρατευόμενοι)⁴¹ and continence according to reason (τῆς κατὰ

³⁷. For Nyssa's teaching on grace see V.Harrison, *Grace and Human Freedom according to Gregory of Nyssa*.

³⁸. Presenting invisible realities in terms of the visible is the practice of χειραγωγή. Cf.M.Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 142-152.

³⁹. See note 1 of the present chapter.

⁴⁰. Cf.Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 2,2,21 (GNO VIII,I, 254,27).

⁴¹. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, 3,7 (BEΠΕΣ 8,32,12).

λόγον ἐγκρατείας).⁴² For Nyssa and Clement 'logical continence' can apply to marriage as well as celibacy (καθαρῶς ἅμα καί λελογισμένως ἐγκρατευσάμενος).⁴³

As a result of Gregory's need to present the value of virginity under its more visible form in the life of the celibate, the modern reader should interpret in each case what he means by virginity. Gregory tells us that the 'power of virginity' allows God to share in human life and 'furnishes the human with wings in itself toward the desire of heavenly things' thus becoming 'a bond of union' which 'through its mediation brings together things so divorced from one another by nature'.⁴⁴ What Gregory says here applies strictly speaking only to virginity in the sense of the cultivation of a pure mind receptive to truth.⁴⁵ However, in the following chapters Nyssa says that celibacy itself gives the power to participate in divine life.

Thus, Nyssa clearly encourages the practice of celibacy at least in the most obvious level of his teaching. He views celibacy and a life of renunciation as a path of purification suitable to most people who begin the struggle toward virtue, but are attached to the satisfaction of the senses and lacking the interest in discovering the truth which must accompany the acquisition of true virtue. These people will come to know purity through renunciation of all to which they are passionately attached. In this way the practice of celibacy can be an aid to the attainment of true virginity. But, even if those who choose a life of celibacy do not attain the deeper virginity, they demonstrate visibly in their way of life the purity of heart which is invisible.

Nyssa lowers his consideration of virginity to a level at which he can better engage the majority of his readers by identifying the invisible state of virginity with the publicly acknowledgeable state of celibacy. Especially in chapter 3 of his *On Virginity*, he appeals to passions and offers celibacy as a solution to the fear of death. His rhetoric in this way imitates the divine economy toward humankind, for God is not content to remain invisible, but enters the visible and corruptible state of being human in order to enter into communication with human beings. He describes

⁴² Ibid. 3,11 (BEΠΕΣ 8,35,31).

⁴³ Ibid. 3,12,79 (BEΠΕΣ 8,38,30–31). Clement also speaks of 'marriage according to reason' (τόν γάμον τόν κατά λόγον) *Stromateis* 3,9 (BEΠΕΣ 8,34,18).

⁴⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 2,3,1–10 (GNO VIII,I, 255,4–13).

⁴⁵ Gregory's metaphor of wings and ascending to heavenly things is similar to the use of this image in Plato's *Phaedrus*. Cf. M. Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 150 n.97.

this divine attitude as love of humankind, φιланθρωπία. Φιλανθρωπία is the response to a God who is φιλόανθρωπος and whose freedom from passion is not removed from what is lower.⁴⁶

Moreover, the concept of moderation is at the heart of what he means by true virginity. He explains the way in which a harmony is achieved between the two sides of our existence as human beings, rational and animal nature, in the management of the various powers of the soul. Nyssa's *On Virginity* focuses upon the renunciation of marriage as a possible and partial answer to the problem of finding a balance between the requirements of the body and the requirements of the soul. Virginity and renunciation make possible a life equal to that of angels inasmuch as the renunciation of marriage, private property, and power minimizes the life of the body and frees one for an angelic life of contemplation.

The place which human beings occupy in the world as 'a mean between the divine and incorporeal nature and irrational and beast-like life'⁴⁷ indicates that the central task for human beings is to integrate these two aspects of human nature in a more fundamental way. The key to this integration is to take from the common and worldly life only that which is 'useful', to limit bodily life. The notion of what is useful includes for Gregory civic and family life. In the light of these things Gregory suggests that we must moderate our desire for tranquillity and exemption from the duties of bodily and community life. Gregory thus 'moderates' the ideal of a life 'equal to angels'. In light of the divine economy or management of human affairs, the divine life can be seen as a life of φιλανθρωπία or service.

Nyssa speaking about true virginity as moderation condemns also those who deny what the body needs and fall into ascetic immoderation and abuse.⁴⁸ The proper goal of one's care for the body is to free the mind so it may contemplate the things above. Excessive discipline loses sight of this goal and instead weakens the mind at the same time that it weakens the body. Gregory is aware of the dependence of the mind upon the body and in effect is warning the ascetic of attempting to deny that a

⁴⁶. Cf. G. Downey, 'Philanthropia in Religion and Statecraft in the fourth Century after Christ', 204.

⁴⁷. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Creation of the Man*, 16 (PG 44,181B).

⁴⁸. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 22,1,1-16 (GNO VIII,I, 330,20-331,10). Cf. *Song of Songs* 9, (GNO VI, 284-286); *The Life of Moses*, 2 (GNO VII, 132-134). See J. Plagnieux, op.cit. 216-231 for the connection of moderation with virginity on Nazianzen.

human being is both rational and animal. The notion of separating body and soul or of living an angelic life can never mean for us attempting to live in our minds while neglecting the body. The supreme goal of virginity is not the distress of the body, but to facilitate the operations of the soul (τὴν τῶν ψυχικῶν διακονημάτων εὐκολίαν).⁴⁹ This concept of moderation is fundamental in Cappadocian thought. It is in the heart of Basil's system that kept a balance of the existing austerities and enthusiasm.⁵⁰ It belongs also to the basic teachings of Gregory Nazianzen.⁵¹ Nazianzen avoids one-sidedness and stresses the need of mean and measure in everyday life. This would appear to have influenced him and explains his various retrogressions when called to assume pastoral dignities. Nazianzen in fact wished to avoid the one-sidedness both of hermitism and of the somewhat mundane ecclesiastical dignities.⁵²

Thus, for the Cappadocians a practice of true virginity contains a certain intellectual virtue along with the moral practice of virtue. True virginity is not simply celibacy, nor even the purity of the soul from desire, as it is with Basil of Ancara, but insight into the nature of the mind, the body, and the world as the final solution to the problem of attachment and passion. The philosophic attachment of virginity involves a certain purification of the soul from attachment to the body and in that respect it is similar to celibacy. However, it differs in its method of purification inasmuch as it purifies the soul through understanding and insight into the nature of reality. The ultimate roots of attachment must be sought in delusion. It is not marriage, or civic responsibility which ties one into passion and attachment, but the delusions under

49. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 22,2,24-28 (GNO VIII,I, 333,7-10).

50. W.Clarke, *St.Basil the Great*, 118-119. See previous chapter. Cf.Basil of Caesarea, *Commentary on Isaiah 174* (PG 30,409BC).

51. J.Plagnieux, *op.cit.* 213f.

52. D.Tsamis, 'The notion of mean in the teaching of Gregory the Theologian Nazianzen on moderation', *Kleronomia* 1, (1969), 275-284. The notion of mean has its roots in the teaching of Plato and Aristotle (*Plato*, *Politeia*, 9,591B, *Nomoi*, 1,631C; Aristotle, *Ithika Nikomachia*, 2,23;2,7; 3.6,113a.29f; 4.14,1128a,31, cf.D.Tsamis, *op.cit.* It is considered a way towards discovery of the truth by the bringing together of dialectical opposites. Thus, virtue is identified with the notion of mean and measure, in other words virtue is the middle path between excess and defect. For the Cappadocians, the notion of mean, instead of appearing as the bringing together of dialectical opposites, constitutes the objective criterion where by all excesses and errors are avoided, in as much as they lie outside the realm of revelation. The Cappadocians speak about 'the royal path', βασιλική ὁδός (Basil, *Commentary on Isaiah 174*, PG 30,409BC). The royal path is the right way of the life in Jesus Christ, which is preeminently in accordance with man's nature. This path for the Cappadocians is neither inhuman, as with the Stoics, nor unworthy of man, as with the Epicurean hedonists.

which one operates in those affairs.⁵³ 'True virginity, being pure from all stain of sin is found to be fit for the purpose' of bringing its practitioners to a life of virtue.⁵⁴ For Nyssa virginity is not only what we might expect the term to mean, that is remaining unmarried in order to pursue a life of greater holiness and dedication to God. On the other hand it is true that for them virginity provides the calm and freedom from distraction which is necessary for the Christian life.

Gregory also names '*true virginity*' as that method which is devised in order to reach 'that which is truly to be desired'. Certain parts of his *On Virginity* link Nyssa's teaching with the work of his brother Basil. 'Our most pious bishop and father' seems to refer to Basil,⁵⁵ as Gregory elsewhere refers to his brother by the title of 'father', and the reference to particular rules which already exist for leading a life of virginity is most likely a reference to Basil's *Asceticon*. Nyssa seems, then, to recognize that Basil is the person most capable of teaching how to live life in virginity and that those who wish to live a celibate life should be directed to Basil and encouraged to join his community of ascetics.

However, this is not as straightforward as it seems. In chapters 7-9 he reverses the usual argument that celibacy is best and marriage is a concession to human weakness with the argument that celibacy is really for 'one who is weakly disposed so as to be unable to stand courageously before the burden of nature.'⁵⁶ He reveals also that through the virtue of moderation, 'concern and desire for divine things' are compatible with marriage and the public service of bearing children.⁵⁷ Thus, there are some elements in Nyssa's theology which distance his thought from more conventional notions of virginity and from the thought of Basil of Caesarea. Chapters 4 and 5, on vice and chapters 10-13, in Nyssa's *On Virginity* on the form of the beautiful and the return to paradise reveal that separation from the trouble of life, which Nyssa has in mind is something deeper than the physical withdrawal usually associated with renunciation and something which is in fact possible to practice under any conditions of life. On the deepest level it is delusion which causes the troubles of life and what is ultimately liberating is not withdrawal from, but insight into the

⁵³ Cf. M. Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 128-129.

⁵⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, Introduction, 2,1-3, (GNO VIII,I, 248,14-16).

⁵⁵ M. Aubineau, SC 119, op.cit. 31; 251 n.8.

⁵⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, 8,26-27 (GNO VIII,I, 285,19-20).

⁵⁷ Ibid. 7,3,4-5 (GNO VIII,I, 284,8-10).

nature of the world and everything in it. This path of insight into, the nature of things is in fact the method of true virginity which Gregory is advocating and not simply celibacy and not ascetical practices as such.

M.Aubineau⁵⁸ and H.Knackstedt⁵⁹ on the contrary have tried to give another interpretation of why Nyssa distinguishes true virginity from mere celibacy and indeed they link it with the similar interpretation of Basil of Ancara. They think that Nyssa wishes to emphasize that virginity of the body alone is insufficient for true virtue: 'This is only the foundation of true virginity which extends to purity and freedom from passion in one's entire life. True virginity, therefore includes a double element: integrity of the body and purity of the soul from passion.'⁶⁰ However, Nyssa probably wants to say something more substantial. For him integrity of the body does not mean just sexual continence and virginity is not the same as celibacy.⁶¹

P.Huybrechts in a recent article and a doctoral thesis on Nyssa's *On Virginity* tries to harmonize the ideas of Basil and Gregory on this subject claiming that the ideal of virginity for the two brothers relates to all Christians married and unmarried.⁶² Although this is true as far as the ideal of virginity that Nyssa has in mind, is it the same for Basil's concept of virginity which most times is identified with celibacy? It seems that Gregory and Basil of Caesarea are not fully like-minded. Gregory is more than the disciple of his brother and is offering some alternative approach to the attainment of virtue from that offered in Basil's *Asceticon*. Gregory in fact has a deeper notion of virginity to offer than Basil and is able to teach a method to those who are ready by which they may reach this level of perfection without the renunciation of marriage. M.Hart claims that Gregory implies that he himself is the married master of the spiritual life, as his brother Basil is the celibate master of the spiritual life.⁶³ That is why he links himself with the figure of patriarch Isaac,⁶⁴ just as he links Basil with the unmarried saints Elias and John the Baptist.⁶⁵ Basil's approach to virtue through virginity perhaps falls short of the wholeness of virtue and

⁵⁸. M.Aubineau, SC 119 op.cit. 146-149.

⁵⁹. H.Knackstedt, op.cit. 17.

⁶⁰. Ibid.

⁶¹. Cf.M.Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 96.

⁶². P.Huybrechts, ' "Le Traité de la virginité", de Grégoire de Nysse', 227-242.

⁶³. M.Hart, *Marriage, Celibacy and the Life of Virtue*, 99. Cf.W.Jaeger, op.cit. 30.

⁶⁴. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, chapter 7.

⁶⁵. Ibid. chapter 6.

the integration of the mind and the body which Gregory has in mind inasmuch as it achieves moderation through the renunciation of family and property. For Gregory the wholeness of virtue is possible even amid the necessary concerns with family and property which come with marriage. However, Gregory sees Basil as an ally. Freedom from passion in the midst of marriage and worldly activity is possible only for those who are able to discern what is good in any circumstances. But for the majority of men and women a life of renunciation under a rule may be of greater benefit to their character. Gregory sends them to Basil, whose guidance of their life would help them avoid the overzealous discipline of the body as well as direct their way of life towards service to others and humility.

True virginity for Nyssa is a notion which operates much the same way the 'true gnostic' is used by Clement of Alexandria, as a way to speak of the perfection of human character.⁶⁶ For Nyssa, the virtue of the true virgin is the virtue of moderation. Moderation is the key to the return to paradise, the original wholeness which humanity enjoyed before fear and shame altered its identity and to which it may return once freedom from passion is regained. Gregory defines moderation as the 'well-ordered management of all the soul's movements with wisdom and prudence'.

Only when virtue has for its foundation insight into the nature of things can it survive under any conditions. The true purity of virginity is therefore not just innocence or inexperience. Such virtue requires special conditions in order to survive and runs the danger to be corrupted as soon as it is tested. But neither is the true purity of virginity the achievement of constant resistance to the temptation from bodily desires. Nyssa tells us to be 'virgins according to reason' overcoming the very delusions which give rise to temptation by investigating the nature of all to which we are inclined to become attached, seeing them as things which of necessity come into being and pass away. Only then do we cease to eat of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil and cease to give a false permanence, security, and significance to the people and things which are part of our lives and return to innocence or virginity of paradise.

⁶⁶. It is characteristic that Clement says that the gnostic souls are those to which the Gospel refers in the parable of the virgins who wait for the Lord (*Stromateis*, 7,12 ΒΕΠΙΕΣ, 8,279,27–28). In the same passage Clement speaks of those who master their desires as 'becoming virgins again through moderation.'

Nazianzen considered also the question of how even those who remain within the world might strive for essentially the same ideal, and how the virginal life, a concept so intrinsic to his concept of asceticism, might extend even to those who are married. Just as his sister, Gorgonia, can live a 'virgin' life within marriage so, for Nazianzen, the attitude one takes rather than one's actual position in life is what is most important.⁶⁷ But Nyssa goes even further than Nazianzen. Ironically, Nyssa indicates that marriage itself can be an element to 'true virginity'. He shows the virtue of married life not only by defending marriage in the face of the heretical groups who considered marriage unworthy of the true Christian. Others had defended marriage against such views, but also had placed it in a second class position with respect to virginity. Nyssa on the contrary seems sometimes suggesting that marriage surpasses virginity in the courage it requires and the service of raising children it performs. He is not proposing that marriage might be elevated to a status of superiority over virginity, but he reconsiders the role of marriage in the achievement of virtue. However, despite that the public service of marriage becomes very important. The health of the Christian community relies upon the health of Christian families. There is no more dramatic proof of this point from the impact which the families of the Cappadocians (among them, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Macrina were the children of a single family), had on the Church in Asia Minor and generally on the Early Church.

⁶⁷. M. Sheather, 'The Eulogies on Macrina and Gorgonia: or, What Difference did Christianity Make?', *Pacifica* 8 (1995), 38.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

The argument of this work, as far as possible, has been made clear in the different chapters and sections. It has been intended to outline the basic points of the Cappadocian teaching on virginity and examine some issues related to this subject. A modern, superficial reader of the early discourses for virginity very often feels that the Early Church attached undue importance to sexual morality and especially to the state of virgin life. Such a reader usually sees the virgin state as a physiological anomaly and marriage as signifying sexual pleasure. However, 'it was the ecclesial concern that gave the sexual ethic of the Early Christians its distinctive edge, its sharp clarity, its reiterated emphasis.'¹ The Church struggled to maintain her own integrity as a heavenly society and needed members whose own bodies stood away from the loss of personal integrity brought about by easy sexual relations. The modern reader is influenced by the modern sexual revolution, but also holds a different ecclesiology, that lowers the boundaries between the Church and the world. The whole discussion of the Early Church sexual ethic and the role of virginity in this respect should take in consideration 'the relationship between the Church and its human environment, the precise sense in which the Christian should be in the world, but not of it.'²

The Cappadocians in their discussion of virginity start from the Trinity. They introduce the idea of the virginity of the Trinity to battle with the heretical teaching that the Son has nothing to do with the idea of begetting. They use magnificently this idea to prove that generation within the Trinity does not involve gender or sexuality and occurs without passion in all the senses of the word *πάθος*. Further, for the Cappadocians, the full concept of virginity in God means the moral and ontological

¹. R.Price, *op.cit.* 273.

². *Ibid.*

purity of God. This idea of the virginity in the Trinity contradicts the attempts of modern feminist theology to see sexuality and gender in the Trinity.³

Virginity approximates the life of the angels by eliminating desires of the body and renouncing marriage, property, and power in order to be free to cultivate the life of the mind and direct desire solely toward union with God. The Cappadocians, although they develop the concept of virginity as the angelic life, maintain that a life in response to the Gospel requires that we moderate not only our desires for bodily pleasures and possessions, but also our desire for the angelic way of life, especially where '*angelic life*' is characterized by the desire for tranquillity and exemption from the duties of bodily life. The angelic life itself can be a form of attachment and passion, concepts diametrically opposite to the notion of virginity in the Cappadocian thought.

The crucial question that the Cappadocians try to answer is: Is the biological condition in which we find ourselves today, that of man before the Fall? A dilemma emerges: either a biological sexuality exists in Paradise, as the divine order to multiply suggests. But then is this not, in man's first condition, a weakening of the divine image by the presence of an animality implying multiplicity and death? Or is the paradisiac condition pure of all animality? But then sin exists in the very fact of our biological life, and we fall into a sort of Manichaeism.

The Cappadocians rejected, with Origenism, the second solution. Gregory of Nyssa (taken up on this point later by Maximus the Confessor) challenged the necessary linking of the sexual division and the Fall. For him, sexuality must have been created by God in view of sin, to preserve humanity after the Fall, though simply as a possibility. This possibility can only be actualized at the moment when, through a sin that has nothing to do with sex, human nature will break and become closed to grace. It is only in this fallen state, in which death is the wages of sin, that this possibility will become necessity. The 'tunics of skin' with which God clothes man after the Fall represent our actual nature, our crude biological state, quite different from the transparent corporeality of Paradise. A new cosmos is formed, which defends itself against its end through sexual relations, thus founding the law of

³ Cf.S.Coakley, 'Sexual metaphor in Origen's *De Oratone*: a speculation about the early development of the doctrine of the Trinity', paper read in the *Twelfth International Conference on Patristic Studies* (Oxford, 21-26 August 1995).

births and deaths. Sexual relations appear not as the cause of mortality, but as its relative antidote.

The Fall has rendered man inferior to his vocation. But the divine plan has not changed. The mission of the first Adam accordingly must be fulfilled by the second Adam, Christ. Because of the sin, in order that man might become God, it was necessary that God should become man, and that the second Adam should inaugurate the 'new creation' in ending all the divisions of the old one. Indeed by his virginal birth, Christ overcomes the division of the sexes and, opens two paths, united only in the person of Mary, at once virgin and mother: the path of marriage and the path of virginity. For the Cappadocians, the wholeness of the Theotokos in her birthgiving is analogous to the incorruptible wholeness of the Father, the Spirit and the Son himself as they participate in the process of Christ's human birth. Virginity is an expression of this wholeness, the freedom from division, instability and diminution. The Theotokos' unique way of giving birth is the form of human generation most like the divine generation itself.

The Cappadocians stress that what is important is the inner substance, not the external state of virginity and equate the virgin state with *apatheia* and with the loss of all fleshly will, all subservience to the passions. The capacity to rise above physical constraints, including sexuality, had been true in a preeminent and unique sense of Christ, whose virgin birth and resurrection transcended our nature both in the manner of his birth and in not being subject to the change of corruption at his death. Virginity was given to help the defeated man to move upwards through purity. It is for this reason that Christ did not come into the world through marriage. Christ himself, being virginal could put an end to the constant succession of death, everlasting so long as marriage continued.

The rhetoric of the Cappadocians does not reveal completely their attitude toward marriage. The true object of their rhetorical exposition is not marriage itself, but the desire for pleasure, the passionate attachment and misguided expectations of happiness which are the basis of most marriages. It is not marriage and civic responsibility which involve one in passion, but the delusions under which one operates in those affairs. The Cappadocians see one particular delusion among all others as standing in the way of moderation within marriage, business, and community life; the delusion of immortality and security through progeny, wealth, or fame. They try to show the tragic consequences when marriage and social life are

burdened with human desires for security and immortality and that the desire for immortality through progeny is very much a barrier for many people to the adoption of virgin life.

The Cappadocians fought to maintain the transcendence of the person against the blind impulse of the species and the idolatry of impersonal pleasure. Their appeals to virgin life originated as a reaction against the sexual laxity prevailing in the pagan world and also as an expression of the other-worldliness of Christianity. Their writings on virginity are not part of a 'repressive discourse' aiming at control and subordination.⁴ They maintained that virginity and marriage, although they presuppose different practical behaviours, are based on the same theology of the Kingdom of God and, therefore, on the same spirituality.⁵ A few negative remarks on marriage are probably due both to the Cappadocians' monastic training and to their instinctive opposition to the sexual cults that characterized ancient culture.⁶ In marriage, the future Kingdom of God—the marriage feast of the Lamb,⁷ the full union between Christ and the Church,⁸ is being anticipated and represented. Marriage finds its ultimate meaning not in fleshly satisfaction, or in social stability, or in securing posterity (the Cappadocians wrote very strongly against all these motives), but in the eschaton which Christ prepares for His elect. Virginity is justified both by Scripture and by the Cappadocian Fathers by the same reference to the future Kingdom. It is, therefore, only a marriage 'in Christ' and virginity 'in Christ', which carry an eschatological meaning and not marriage concluded casually as a contract, or as a satisfaction for the flesh, and not virginity accepted by egotism and self-protective irresponsibility. Virginity and marriage are not isolated. Just as marriage implies sacrifice and dedication, so virginity is unthinkable without prayer, fasting, obedience, humility, charity and constant ascetical effort.

The Cappadocian teaching on virginity is particularly important today in the light of the sexual revolution. It is not important to determine whether virginity should be seen as a state above nature or superior to the married state. Both are sanctified by grace and serve to glorify God and to defeat the powers of corrupt

⁴. P.Beagon, op.cit. 165-166.

⁵. J.Meyendorff, 'Christian Marriage in Byzantium: The Canonical and Liturgical Tradition', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44, 1990, 99-107.

⁶. J.Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 232 n.28

⁷. *Rev.* 19,7,9.

⁸. *Eph.* 5,32.

sexual behaviour. Sexual continence and moral purity are a psychophysical askesis for self-mastery and obedience to a transcendent spirituality. Virginity assumed out of revulsion for the flesh, or because of egocentricity, is a distortion of the idea of virginity that the Cappadocians had in mind. Rather, virginity is a *martyria*, a witness to the Kingdom in joyful ascent through charity and humility.

The Cappadocians considered the question of how even those who remain within this world might strive for essentially the same ideal, and how the 'virginal' life, a concept so intrinsic to their concept of asceticism, might extend even to those who are married. Thus, for them the concept of virginity ceased to be a simple equivalent for sexual abstinence. Their basic instincts were against the Gnostic tendency to divide the Church into first-class and second-class citizens. There were some who had attained greater perfection, while others were less advanced along the road, but the same ideal governed all. The ascetic contemplative life is the true Christian life and all are required to lead it. The virgin, retiring from the worldly affairs, has chosen the best and more likely way to lead this life, yet the demand to live the holy life extends to the whole Church. Thus, the Cappadocian teaching which was examined offers a link between virginity and marriage as the two vocations within a single state of life, two ways of responding to a single spiritual concern, of equal value and which both possess the virtue of integrity, thus implying an equal submission to the gospel demand of perfection. The Cappadocians view virginity not as a negation of sexual energy which is part of human reality, but in fact its legitimate transposition and necessary transfer to the eschatological level of God's Kingdom.

The Cappadocians in their teaching on virginity are not only speaking of how to order the individual soul, but also of how to order society in general toward the highest things. Their treatment of moderation is also an exercise in political philosophy. The concern for virginity which is the proper foundation for virtue is thus in its deepest sense not merely a concern for purity as such, but a concern for wisdom. The Cappadocians are not concerned with the question of the best '*politeia*' as is Plato in the *Republic*, nor do they display much of an interest in civic politics. This is perhaps because at this time, living under a vast empire, there was little opportunity to influence civil politics for the better. However, as the church was coming into its own as a force within the empire, there existed an opportunity to influence the shape which Christian society would take for centuries to come. The

concern for virginity is the attempt to construct the foundation for this society, to increase the probability that a higher way of life would result within the church.

Evil lies only in vice, in the separation from God. The virgin does not strive to be separate from anything but sin, the passion of a soul lost in delusion, not the passion which is a natural part of bodily existence. The choice of the life of the mind in neglect of the community is thus a vice. The Cappadocians approve of withdrawal in order to free the mind from its delusions and passions, but insist that *apatheia* is grounded in *φιλανθρωπία* and *ἀγάπη*. The life of isolation cannot be achieved in neglect of the life of community. It was possible for a Christian dedicated to asceticism to lead a life that was active and community-minded.

The teaching of the Cappadocians outlined here and especially the comparison and interrelation between the active and contemplative lifestyles may also be able to say something significant to today's churches. It could help those Christians who have only social orientations to see their concerns for social justice in a broader anthropological, Christological, soteriological and eschatological context. It could also help those Christians who have no social insights to remember that works of charity have always formed an integral part of their Church's practice. Human life cannot be divided into mutually exclusive sacred and secular or contemplative and active dimensions. Persons and communities have different vocations, but in the Church as a whole, all the parts co-inhere as members of one body characterized by wholeness and fullness of life.

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